THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE.

THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE

AND THE LIFE OF SACRIFICE

IN THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

FROM THE ORIGINAL OF

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"Courage, dearest daughter. You are now laid in spirit on the altar, there to be offered in sacrifice and slain; nay, more, to be consumed as a holocaust in the sight of the living God."

—St. Francis of Sales, Letter to a Nun on the Occasion of her Profession.

PREFACE.

After the Priesthood, the life of the monk or nun is the brightest ornament of the Church of Jesus Christ. We may say of it what one of the Fathers in the first ages of Christianity said of virginity: "It is the fairest, most glorious fruit of divine grace; a work perfect and unblemished, worthy to be extolled and magnified, a mirror in which the holiness of God is reflected here below, the most glorious gift of Christ to His flock, the joy of the Church." [1]

No wonder, then, that so lovely and attractive a theme should have inspired the pen of a great number of writers. How delightful it is to work for the souls whom Our Lord loves with a special predilection! How exalted a task to promote the sanctification of those favored ones who, provided they correspond to the wondrous grace vouchsafed to them, afford abundant consolation to the heart of their divine Spouse, and abundant edification to holy Church, their Mother, whose most illustrious children they are!

It is to Father Rodriguez, S.J., that we owe the first comprehensive treatise [2] on the religious life, the first and

[1] St. Cyprian, *de Habitu Virginum.*

[2] We have said: *The first comprehensive treatise,* because this excellent work, as such, stands first even as regards the time of pub-

foremost in every respect. His admirable work is and always will be the one most highly esteemed by religious communities.

After him comes Father Saint-Jure, also a member of the illustrious Society of Jesus. His work[1] is, like that of Father Rodriguez, to be found in every religious house, and souls who are consecrated to God derive great profit from his doctrine and teaching.

In our own day a great many authors, following in their steps, have endeavored by means of writings of various descriptions (treatises, sermons, letters, conferences, catechisms, meditations) to set before the denizens of the cloister the duties of their holy state in their entirety. Of these the treatise on the religious state, by Fr. Gautrelet, also a Jesuit, seems to us the best. All, however, have done, and still continue to do, a vast amount of good. The numerous Congregations which have multiplied to such an astonishing extent within the last fifty years needed the various instructions contained in these writings, and have doubtless profited by them to the edification of the Church.

We, in our turn, have attempted to be of service to them in the work of their sanctification, a work of such vital importance. The treatise we now lay before the reader treats of the religious state from the special point of view of the victim's self-surrender.

We employ the word *victim* here, although on the title-

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lication; if, however, it were a question of writings treating of the religious life and containing most valuable counsels for those who embrace that holy state, it would be necessary to go back to the early ages of the Church, and mention, in addition to the works of the Fathers (Tertullian, St. Cyprian, St. Ambrose, and others) on virginity, a great number of homilies, letters, opuscules, etc., by various eminent saints, on the monastic life.

[1] L'homme religieux, par le R. P. Saint-Jure, S.J.

page of this work we have preferred to speak of the life of *sacrifice*. The sense is the same in both, but we thought it best to make use of the latter term lest our announcement might seem to suggest some singularity of doctrine and practice. It will, however, be seen that the standpoint we have chosen is anything but a fanciful or unauthorized one. The view we take of the religious life is, in fact, by no means new; every author who has selected this beautiful subject as his theme points it out, but without enlarging upon it; whereas what we propose to consider in the religious state is preeminently the life of the monk or nun as a victim.

We can not but think that this view of the religious life is not only a true one, but also one which imparts to it a character eminently weighty, elevated, profound, and calculated to inspire souls consecrated to God by solemn vows with more generous aspirations, holier dispositions.

We submit our way of looking at this subject with the utmost respect to the judgment of men of authority and experience, who may find time to read this book.

The essential point is that every soul whom the divine Spouse has deigned to call to the signal honor of this celestial union with Himself should endeavor, by the use of every attainable means, to correspond to His merciful designs. The times in which we live are evil, and we may well say with St. Paul: "Redeeming the time because the days are evil" (Eph. v. 16). The spirit of seduction is so powerful! Who can say whether there are not within the vast fold of the Church of God some Communities which, under pretexts more or less plausible, have allowed the spirit of the world to find its way into their midst, and effect the deterioration of that grand and holy life of religion which constituted the strength and the glory of their Institute at the outset? And who can say whether days of trial, of tribulation, of persecution, are

not in store for us? [1] If so, what will then become of the tepid Religious, of the Community in which laxity prevails? Let us then lose no time, but set to work without delay, and by renewing our zeal, no longer render the sublime, the inestimable grace of our vocation void and illusory.

At any rate, even if our fervor has already borne blessed fruit in the bosom of holy Church, ought we not, seeing how evil are the times in which we live, to animate ourselves to greater generosity in our intentions, greater perfection in our actions? Look at the state of society; see the multitude of those whose aim is the destruction of peace and social order; above all, note the trials, the afflictions of the Church. How much iniquity there is in the world, how much crime which can not fail to provoke the just wrath of the Most High! Now Religious are, in virtue of their vocation and their state, mediators between a guilty world and the God whose sovereign majesty they have offended. But what interior sanctity is requisite in order to exercise this ministry of reconciliation! Shall we be qualified to exercise it efficaciously if we present ourselves before God in the state of grace of the ordinary Christian, which undoubtedly renders us acceptable in His sight, but which is obviously insufficient to save unhappy sinners from the chastisements of His just and terrible vengeance?

At every period the souls consecrated to Him by the vows of religion have been propitiatory victims in union with Jesus Christ, our one mediator with the Father, and with Mary, the Patroness of our work of expiation, yet in the present day when there is so much on every side to make us sad, when we see impiety and sacrilege trium-

[1] Alas! when we penned these lines (in 1873) we little thought that our fears would be justified by the fatal decrees of the [French] Government. And who knows what the future may have in store?

phantly enthroned in the Eternal City, and the Vicar of Jesus Christ despoiled of his rights, a prisoner among his own children, ought not those whose animating principle is the victim's spirit of self-surrender, to be stimulated by it to the accomplishment of works of still greater perfection, to deeds, if possible, of heroic virtue? This, in fact, is what is expected of them by sinners, by the just, by the Church, by the clergy, above all by God Himself.

Would to God that the book now offered to them might prove useful to them for the attainment of this end!

May Our Lord and His blessed, most amiable Mother vouchsafe to accept and bless it! We dedicate and commend it to the all-merciful hearts of Jesus and Mary by the hands of one of the most saintly of the souls who, consecrated to them in the religious state, have been their consolation and their glory, Blessed Margaret Mary, true spouse, apostle and victim of the Heart of Jesus, worthy and beloved daughter of the Queen of virgins, holy and favored of God, whom we venerate as a powerful protectress, a kind, unfailing guide, a tender mother and patroness.

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THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE.

Part I.

Motives for the Practice of the Life of Sacrifice in the Religious State, and the Excellence of that Practice.

CHAPTER I.

THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE IS THE ESSENTIAL AND FUNDAMENTAL SPIRIT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

Some time ago we wrote a short treatise entitled "The Union of the Christian with Our Lord Jesus Christ in His Life of Sacrifice." Many Religious are acquainted with it. In the first chapters of the present work it is our purpose to demonstrate that the spirit of sacrifice is the essence of the Christian life; an assertion the truth of which we imagine it is not possible to question for a moment. But if that assertion is incontestable, even self-evident, it will be seen that the closest relations exist between the victim's spirit of sacrifice and the religious life, since, if the spirit of sacrifice is the foundation and essential characteristic of the Christian life, the religious life, which aspires to the attainment of the greatest perfection of the Chris-

tian life, ought, for that very reason, to aim at attaining the perfection of a victim's life of self-surrender. The present treatise, which is intended for the use of persons living in community, accordingly does not present to them as a subject of meditation one isolated truth, but on the contrary a succession of truths naturally suited to them, and which, should it so please Our Lord and His holy Mother, may prove highly beneficial.

However, since it is probable that among the readers of this second work there will be many who may not have read the first, and since the doctrine laid down in the first is naturally the basis of the truths we are about to expound in the second, we will, in this opening chapter, briefly recapitulate that doctrine, in order that thus the connection of the ideas upon which we shall subsequently enlarge may be more clearly seen, and our teaching rendered a more complete whole.

No truth is more elementary than this: The Christian is another Christ, *Christianus alter Christus*. We shall now proceed to show how Catholic theology, based on the teaching of Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Church, explains and develops that truth.

In every human being there is a threefold life, each of which is real and distinct from the others; there is the life of the body, the natural life of the soul, and the supernatural life of the soul. The life of the body we possess in common with the lower animals; it is finite, and, in fact, destined to be ended by death.

The natural life of the soul consists in the possession and exercise of the natural faculties of the soul: impressionability, understanding, judgment, memory, will, and freedom.

This life is common to all men, whether Christians or unbelievers. It is far more perfect than the former, far superior to it, but the acts proper to it can not of them-

selves alone merit for us the friendship of God and eternal salvation.

The supernatural life of the soul is that which is given to us in the Sacrament of Baptism. It is the life of Jesus Christ Himself. When He says: "I am come that they may have life and may have it more abundantly" (John x. 10), it is of this supernatural life that He speaks. This same life St. Paul depicted with a masterly hand and held up for the admiration of the early Christians in the words: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20).

A life of this nature, as is evident, argues interior acts which are its offspring, and which correspond to it. This led St. Paul to say: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. ii. 5); and since life does not confine its operation to the interior, but also manifests itself externally by the outward actions it produces, the great Apostle says in another place: Wherefore, if we have received within us this new life, this spiritual, divine life, our external actions must spring from it and bear its impress: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. v. 25).

This life is so real, so true, that just as the act whereby God gave us the first life, which is that of the body, and the second life, which is the natural life of the soul, was truly an act of creation, so the communication of the supernatural life may with equal justice be termed an act of creation. "You have been created in Jesus Christ," the same Apostle says, "a new creature" (II. Cor. v. 17); and that you may know that the connection between this life and its source remains unbroken, I proclaim to you this fact, that we all, who have been baptized into Jesus Christ, form but one body with Him. We are the members of that body and He is the head; "we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" (Eph. v. 30).

It is impossible, therefore, that our union with Our Lord could be more intimate than it is. It follows, as a natural consequence, that His life is our life.

St. Augustine, referring to the origin of the union that exists between Christ and the Christian, says: "The same grace which made Christ to be our Head, made us His members. *Ea gratia fit ab initio fidei suæ homo quicunque Christianus, qua gratia Homo ille ab initio suo factus est Christus. De ipso spiritu est hic renatus de quo est ille natus.* By that grace whereby any man becomes a Christian from the commencement of his faith, by the same grace that Man from the beginning was made Christ. By the selfsame Spirit by whose operation He was born, the man is born again."

Thus that truth which invests us with such dignity is abundantly proved: the Christian is another Christ: *Christianus alter Christus.*

But what follows from this? It follows that the life of the Christian is essentially that of a victim. Why so? This is the reason: It has been shown that the Christian is another Christ; now we know that Jesus Christ is preeminently and supereminently a sacrificial victim.

In order to prove this we must first ask ourselves for what end Our Lord came on earth, and then show that He willed to attain that end in the capacity of a victim and by a victim's self-surrender.

The end for which Our Lord came on earth was unquestionably the glory of His Father; and to promote that glory, He achieved the salvation of souls. It is, in fact, impossible to perceive any other end or purpose in the thirty-three years of Our Saviour's life on earth—for, since the accomplishment of that end, the greater glory of God, is obligatory upon every created being, how much the more ought this to be apparent as the actuating motive of every action in the life of the Incarnate Word, in whom

everything was absolutely perfect! This was then the continual, all-absorbing thought of His Heart and mind: He declares this Himself most emphatically: "I seek not My own glory, but the glory of Him that sent Me" (John viii. 50; vii. 18).

Now in what character and by what act did He chiefly give glory to His Father? Obviously it was by this sacrifice of Himself, and in the capacity of a sacrificial victim. His sacrifice of Himself is the one great act He came to accomplish, and under no aspect does He appear so exalted, so perfect, as in His condition as a victim. By that act and in that character He restored to His Father the glory of which He had been deprived by sin, and restored it in superabundant measure. In how sublime a manner He, the God made man, rendered a tribute of praise to the majesty of God the Father, when He abased Himself so profoundly in the mystery of the Incarnation, offering Himself as an oblation, and when He immolated Himself as a holocaust on Calvary! How infinite the holiness of God is shown to be, how terrible His justice, since so great a satisfaction is demanded, so stupendous an atonement! It is indeed impossible to imagine any act whereby greater honor could be given to God than that which accrued to Him from the oblation and self-immolation of His only Son; and this is what the Redeemer Himself asserts in addressing to His Father these words at the moment of His Incarnation: "Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldest not, but a body Thou hast fitted to Me; holocausts for sin did not please Thee. Then said I: Behold I come, to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. x. 5–9).

Thus it has been shown what was the principal end which Our Lord proposed to Himself: His Father's glory; and wondrously well that end was attained. But Jesus Christ, in His great mercy, desired that the salvation of souls should be effected in conjunction with the attain-

ment of that end; that is to say, He, the God of charity, willed that the selfsame acts which gave so great glory to God should also be the price of our Redemption. Thus it was also in His state, in His capacity of a victim of expiation that He achieved our salvation. To this truth the Holy Scriptures afford abundant testimony; under both the Old and the New Dispensation the witness they bear is one and the same.

Under the ancient law the prophet Isaias plainly refers to Our Lord when he says: "He was offered because it was His own will. He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter. He was struck by God and afflicted. He was wounded for our iniquities; He was bruised for our sins, and by this He hath justified many, for He hath borne their iniquities" (Is. liii.).

In the New Testament St. Paul is the great preacher and exponent of the doctrine of our Redemption. In his epistles he recalls it constantly to our mind. "Christ," he says, "was offered once to exhaust the sins of many. To His Father He saith: Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldest not," adding immediately: "Behold I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. ix. 28; x. 8, 9). Thus it is in the accomplishment of that will of God that we were sanctified by the oblation of the body of Jesus Christ once made. "Jesus, having offered one sacrifice (that is, Himself) for sins, merited to sit forever on the right hand of God, His Father: and by this one oblation He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified; and the Holy Ghost also Himself doth testify this to us, for He saith: Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. x. 12, 14, 17).

Such are the words in which St. Paul speaks of the oblation Christ offered, and the results of that oblation. What he says of his immolation of himself is yet more striking. It would, however, be beyond our power to quote one-

half of the almost innumerable passages in his epistles which tell us that it is through the shedding of Christ's blood and by His death upon the cross that complete reparation has been made, and that through Him God the Father has "reconciled all things unto Himself both as to the things on earth and the things that are in heaven" (Col. i. 20). Again, St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, speaking in his turn says in his first epistle: All of you know well "that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as gold or silver, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled; foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but manifested in the last times for you" (I. Peter i. 18–20); for love of us.

Hence we see that no doubt is possible upon this point; the end for which Our Lord came into the world was the glory of His Father, and He graciously vouchsafed that simultaneously with the realization of that end, our salvation should be accomplished; and He achieved both those grand designs in the sublimest manner by the sacrifice of Himself and the shedding of His blood. Thus we must conclude that before all, and above all, Jesus, in His quality of Redeemer, is a propitiatory victim. The deepest sentiment of the Heart of Jesus, the most habitual and general posture of His Heart, was that of a victim; and "of all His states the one which best expresses His perfect consummation in His Father, and at the same time shows the magnitude of the gift of Himself which of His own will He gave to mankind by His immolation of Himself for them, is the state of a victim" (Mgr. Baudry, "Le Cœur de Jesus").

Now the Christian is, in virtue of his baptism, another Christ. Consequently he is before all, and above all, a propitiatory victim.

But if the grace received at baptism is a grace that

enables the Christian to become a victim of propitiation, it is evident that his dispositions, his aspirations, his whole life ought to be the dispositions, the aspirations, the life of a victim. This is in fact a foregone conclusion: The grace of our baptism is a sacrificial grace. The different degrees of perfection which this initial grace may, through the assistance of actual graces, later on acquire, are the different degrees of perfection appertaining to the life of a victim. Now the life by which the Christian who merely keeps the commandments of God and of the Church, yet keeps them conscientiously, and thus lives in a real union with Our Lord, is indeed that of a victim; but although he performs all the acts essential to that life, it is, in his case, in an imperfect stage.[1] Whereas the generous Christian who applies himself to follow the evangelical counsels, and by that means aims at the acquisition of Christian perfection, who consequently lives in a close and intimate union with Jesus Christ, his divine Master, such a Christian as that aspires to the attainment of the perfection of a victim's life of self-surrender.

How sublime does the Christian life appear when regarded from this point of view! This is, so it seems to us, its most beauteous aspect, the one which reveals more simply, more accurately, more perfectly than any other the true character of our spiritual life in its beginning, its progress, and its consummation. Holy Scripture tells us: "Whom God the Father foreknew, them He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son" (Rom. viii. 29). Now this conformity, this necessary resemblance to Jesus Christ, is the likeness which exists between Jesus Christ and ourselves if we are victims with

[1] "He that keepeth the law multiplieth offerings. It is a wholesome sacrifice to take heed to the commandments" (Ecclus. xxxv. 1, 2).

Him and like Him, in the sight of His Father, striving after the same ends, actuated by the same spirit.

After this, who will wonder at hearing St. Paul declare to the Romans that the end and object of his apostolic vocation and of his sacerdotal ministry is to procure victims for God, by the preaching of the Gospel? "I have written to you, brethren, more boldly," he says, "as it were putting you in mind because of the grace which is given me from God, that I should be the minister of Christ Jesus among the Gentiles" (Rom. xv. 15, 16), in order to exercise in their regard the functions of the priesthood and my power of offering sacrifice, by announcing to them the Gospel of God, and thus offering an oblation of the Gentiles acceptable to God and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.[1] Shortly before we find him exhorting the Romans to enter upon this way, nay, urging them to do so in these forcible words: "I beseech you by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing unto God" (Rom. xii. 1).

Happy the soul who meditates continually upon these truths and learns to comprehend their true meaning! That soul will then understand the designs of God in her regard, she will understand the whole economy of grace, and the end for which she has been called into fellowship with God in Jesus Christ.

Let us then, as Bossuet says, enter with Christ into this spirit of self-surrender; if He sanctifies Himself, if He sacrifices Himself for us, we ought also to sacrifice ourselves for Him. Thus we shall be sanctified truly and indeed; and Jesus Christ will "of God be made unto us wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption."

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[1] This is the interpretation of this passage by Cornelius à Lapide: *Ad hoc sum sacerdos mysticus ut per meam prædicationem Gentiles quasi victimæ mundæ Deo offerantur*, etc.

CHAPTER II.

THE ESSENTIAL SPIRIT OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE CONSISTS IN STRIVING AFTER THE PERFECTION OF A VICTIM'S LIFE.

Every Christian is a victim. He is so in virtue of his baptism. He is a victim offered to God with Jesus, like Jesus, for the same end and object as the sacrifice offered by that adorable Redeemer Himself.

This is a fundamental truth on which we can never sufficiently meditate, for it teaches us in what our true glory consists; it reveals to us the excellence of the state of grace in which we stand, and the obligations that state imposes on us. But, as we have already given the reader to understand in the foregoing chapter, if it is indubitably true that every Christian is a victim, it is also true that by no means is every Christian bound to strive after the attainment of the perfection of a victim's life and state of self-surrender.

It is enough for the ordinary Christian to keep the commandments in order not to fall away from the grace received in baptism. More than this God does not ask of him; and he who faithfully observes God's law is really and truly a victim in the sight of the divine Majesty, although at the same time an imperfect one.

Now besides this ordinary and imperfect state there is a holier and a higher state, the life of perfection, in which the fortunate individual who embraces it is not content with the exact fulfilment of the commandments, but

strives with generous zeal to practise the evangelical counsels. Our Lord, when on earth, did not confine Himself to recalling to our minds the precepts we are bound to obey; He also proposed to us counsels to be followed. These counsels are contained in the holy Gospel; they relate to various virtues; the principal ones, however, the counsels *par excellence*, are those which recommend the practice of poverty, obedience, and chastity in their highest, most perfect degree.

When a generous promise has been made to God to follow those counsels, not merely a pious resolution and an interior good will such as any fervent Christian living in the world may have, but a solemn vow, in a community approved by the Church, this constitutes the religious state; and the devout Christian who enters upon this supernatural life is actually in a state which tends to the practice of Christian perfection. The meaning of this evidently is that his state is the state of a soul progressing with ever greater fervor in the way of self-immolation and of sacrifice. In his character of a Christian he is already a victim; in his character of a Religious, he aspires to become a perfect victim.

O happy state, which calls forth the admiration of angels and is a source of consolation to the hearts of Jesus and Mary! The perfection to which the Religious is called is not acquired in a single day; it is not demanded of him from the outset, on his entry into the cloister; but day by day he will advance toward that goal, it will be his aspiration to gain that precious treasure. The vows he has taken, his holy Rule, all the many means that constantly present themselves to the fervent Religious at every step on his heavenward way, will contribute efficaciously to the attainment of his end, and by making use of them he will attain that end. God will be glorified in him, and the God of all goodness, beholding in that faith-

ful Religious the image of Jesus Christ, will be graciously pleased to say in the presence of His angels: "This is My beloved son in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. xvii. 5).

This is indeed saying a great deal. Yet nothing is simpler than the truth which is here laid down.

It is, however, only because the true Religious is, with Christ and like Christ, a complete victim before God, that his likeness to Christ, in which the Father takes delight, is a perfect likeness. For it is in his capacity of a propitiatory victim that Our Lord renders to the Father all the glory due to Him, and is regarded by Him with good pleasure. Thus it is also in the attitude of a victim, which the Religious assumes in virtue of his religious profession, that he becomes both like unto the image of Christ and acceptable in the sight of the Father.

The perfect Religious therefore (one, that is, who corresponds faithfully to the grace of his vocation) will be a perfect victim. Here let us pause for a moment, and listen to those who are best qualified to speak on this subject, and it will be seen how fully their ideas and their teaching confirm the truths which we have just enunciated.

St. Augustine, whose beautiful treatise, entitled "De Civitate Dei," abounds in striking passages on the Christian's union with Our Lord in His life as a victim, says expressly: "That man is truly a holocaust who, being consecrated to God and dedicated to His service, dies to the world and lives to God alone." This passage is explicit. It is obviously the monk or nun who is here spoken of.

"Under the Old Law," says St. Gregory the Great, "the flesh of an alien victim was immolated; but by the practise of obedience a man immolates his own will." These words are specially true in regard to religious obedience. We will hear what the same holy Pope says concerning poverty:

"Let us suppose that a man resolves to give all that he possesses to the poor, reserving nothing for himself; by what name shall we designate his intention? It is a holocaust. His piety induces him to offer a perfect sacrifice, for when we speak of a holocaust we mean an entire, a complete sacrifice. In fact those who give everything to God, who offer to Him all that they have, all that they are, all that they love, who retain absolutely nothing for themselves, but sacrifice to God their senses, their speech, their life, in short, all the gifts they have received from Him—those persons, I say, offer to God the most perfect holocaust." Such are the holy Pontiff's words. Unquestionably it is the state, the sentiments of the true Religious which he here depicts.

Elsewhere, speaking of chastity, the third of the religious vows, he says: "There are some who, having consecrated and dedicated themselves to God by solemn vows, have reached so high a degree of perfection that by the courageous resolve to preserve their chastity intact, they have become in a certain sense proof against attack both in body and mind. Assuredly such persons, by virtue of the life they lead, are really a holocaust."

Thus it is evident that the profession of obedience, of chastity, and of poverty places the Religious in a state which is one of perfect sacrifice, because the victim he immolates by that profession is himself, and not another.

After St. Gregory let us listen to St. Thomas Aquinas, who is universally acknowledged to be the glory, the prince of theologians.

"Those," he says, "are termed Religious, who dedicate themselves entirely to the service of God, and who present themselves to Him as a holocaust. In fact the religious state may be regarded as a holocaust whereby a man offers himself to God wholly and entirely, with all that he calls his own. By the vow of voluntary poverty

all external possessions are offered to God; one's own body is consecrated to Him, chiefly by the vow of continence; finally man's chief possession, the soul, is presented to Him in its entirety by obedience, since thereby the sacrifice of one's own will is offered to Him."

Thus speaks the Angelic Doctor. Father Saint Jure, in his admirable treatise, "L'homme Religieux," quotes those words, and enlarges on the subject in this wise:

"The Religious, by the vows he takes, constitutes himself a sacrificial victim to the greater glory of God; and in order that he may carry them into practise, he must live in the victim's spirit of self-sacrifice, following the example of Our Lord, of whom St. Paul says that being made a high priest, He 'offered Himself unspotted unto God' (Heb. ix. 14). And in another place he says: 'Christ also hath loved us and hath delivered Himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odor of sweetness' (Eph. v. 2); so that in this sublime act He was at one and the same time both Priest and Victim, the one who offered the oblation and the oblation itself, as St. Augustine remarks. Now throughout His whole life His attitude was that of a victim, and in the spirit of a victim He performed all His actions.

"The Religious ought to mold himself on the model of this divine Exemplar, to regard himself as a victim consecrated by his vows to the service and the glory of God. In this intention he ought constantly to act and to cause all his works to bear this sacrificial stamp, thus, out of love, constituting himself, like Our Lord, a priest, and the one by whom the sacrifice of himself is offered, in order to sacrifice to God his thoughts, his judgment, his will, his wishes, his feelings, his own ease and comfort, everything in short, only acting in every respect as a victim whose destiny is to be slain for the greater glory of God, already dying to all around by the mystic death of which St. Paul

speaks when he says: 'I die daily' (I. Cor. xv. 31). Such is the manner in which the Religious ought to carry out his vows."

Nothing could be more explicit than this teaching of the servants of God who are most conversant with the science of the religious life. But let us not grow weary of listening to them; we will hear what the gentle St. Francis of Sales says on the subject. He writes thus to a young nun recently professed:

"Take courage, my dear daughter; you are now laid in spirit on the sacred altar, there to be offered in sacrifice, to be immolated, nay, even to be consumed as a whole burnt-offering in the sight of the living God."

Again, addressing a postulant, he says: "It is incumbent on me, my dearest child, to tell you that you are already wholly dead to the world, and the world is wholly dead to you. This is one stage in the sacrificial process; two more remain. One is that of flaying the victim, stripping your heart of self, cutting off, banishing every lingering affection you may yet retain for nature and the world; the other is that of consuming your self-love, reducing it to ashes and transforming your whole soul into one bright flame of celestial charity."

What a hard saying is this! Who would have expected such austere teaching from the lips of the gentle, indulgent Bishop of Geneva! The reason he so speaks is because the religious life is regarded by him, as by all the saints, a life of perpetual self-immolation, of self-surrender without reserve, without any prospect but that of remaining continually upon the altar of sacrifice. And the saintly bishop taught the same doctrine in the conferences he gave to the Community as in the letters he wrote to individual members of his cherished Order of the Visitation.

"It is necessary that you should know," he says, "what

it is to be a nun and how to be a nun. It is to be bound to serve God by perpetual mortification of self, and to live to God alone. It will not do to tell those who are going to embrace the religious life that when they are nuns Our Lord will take them on to Mount Thabor, where they will say with St. Peter: 'It is good for us to be here.' On the contrary, they must be told, whether they are entering the novitiate or about to be professed: You will have to ascend Calvary, to crucify yourself there with Our Lord; you will have to crucify your understanding in order to place a restraint upon your thoughts, so as not willingly to give admission to any besides those that are marked out for you by the vocation you have chosen. You will have even to crucify your memory in order forever to exclude the remembrance of what you left when you quitted the world. Finally, you will have to crucify your own will and nail it to the cross of Our Lord, that you may no longer employ it at your own pleasure, but may live in the practise of perfect submission and obedience all the days of your life."

The saint spoke even more plainly when addressing his spiritual daughters, the inmates of the first House he founded in Paris, who noted down his words as they fell from his lips. "For what purpose, think you, my daughters, has God sent you into the world, and above all called you to the religious state, if not in order that you may be propitiatory victims, that throughout your whole life you may be a sacrifice and oblation to His divine Majesty, victims daily consumed on the altar of charity?"

In the same century in which the holy Bishop of Geneva founded the Visitation, enabling a great number of souls to take refuge under its less rigorous Rule, the far-famed Abbé de Rancé reformed La Trappe, restoring its pristine fervor and ancient discipline. The work achieved by these two men respectively was of a very different nature. Yet

the holy founder and the austere reformer speak one and the same language. "Consecration by the vows," the latter says, "is the immolation of a holocaust which admits neither of restriction nor reserve." These words might be the epigraph of his admirable work on the sanctity and the duties of the monastic life.

All who are taught by the Holy Ghost make use of the same language, are animated by the same spirit. The author of the "Imitation" utters this concise but sublime sentence: "Verily, the life of the good monk is a cross" (Im., B. iii., Ch. 56). And what is the cross if not the altar on which the victim is laid?

We will no longer quote the testimony of the saints. In the course of this work their maxims will often recur. We can not do better than conclude this chapter with the beautiful utterance of one of the most eminent servants of God in our own day, the Rev. Mother Emilie de Rodat, Foundress of the Institute of the Holy Family.

"It is, above all," she said to her daughters in religion, "in His character of a victim that Jesus is our pattern, and it is only by walking in the footsteps of Him who sacrificed Himself for our sake, to unite us to God, that we can become His true spouses."

CHAPTER III.

THE RELIGIOUS IS THE PRIEST WHO OFFERS THE SACRIFICE OF WHICH HE IS HIMSELF THE VICTIM.

Clearly, therefore, every Religious is a victim, and a victim in a special sense of the word; that is to say, not merely as every Christian ought to be, in virtue of the grace of his baptism, but with dispositions of no ordinary zeal for the glory of God and his personal sanctification. This point of view, this manner of looking at the religious life, has engaged the attention of every author who has treated of the excellence of that holy state. Bourdaloue lays great stress upon this point; in fact he goes so far as to say that he considers no other capable of giving us so natural, so correct an idea of what is involved in taking the vows. In his opinion the religious life is preeminently the life of a sacrificial victim, and the act of profession which pledges him irrevocably to lead that life is a real sacrifice, the grandeur of which we are compelled to admire. He speaks as follows:

"The vows of religion—in other words, the religious sacrifice. But how is the religious profession a sacrifice? In two ways which stand in singular relationship to each other. In the first place because it is the Religious himself, who, in his own person, fills the office of the priest and offers the sacrifice. In the second place, because in this sacrifice it is the Religious who himself, in his own person, holds the position of the sacrificial victim, is the

oblation that is offered. The Religious, when he takes the vows, is both priest and victim; at one and the same time the priest who offers the sacrifice and the victim who is offered; the officiating priest, who by this same oblation and sacrifice pledges himself solemnly and certainly to the service of God; the victim who is offered, and who in consequence of this oblation, this sacrifice, belongs to God from that time forth in a very special and exclusive manner. Here we have two aspects under which every Religious may look upon himself, two views of his state which ought to guide him in regulating his whole life, and which, both the one and the other, may furnish him with most edifying reflections and most salutary instructions in respect of the state he has embraced.

"We have said it is the Religious who himself and in his own person, in taking the vows, is the priest who offers the sacrifice: why is this so? Because it is he who binds himself by a solemn promise, who dedicates himself, who gives himself, his very self, who, in short, immolates and sacrifices himself. God is present at this sacrifice to accept it; the minister deputed by the Church is present to receive it; the faithful are present to witness it and bear testimony to its reality; but the one who makes the sacrifice is the Religious himself, and no one can make it for him."

Such are the words of the celebrated Jesuit. Let us follow up his idea and consider in turn these two facts: the Religious is, in the sacrifice of himself, at once the priest who offers the sacrifice and the victim who is offered. The Religious is himself the priest who offers the sacrifice of himself.

In the first place it behooves us to know that the sacerdotal character, as well as the character of victim, originates in the grace of baptism. In that sacrament, in fact, we received not only the spirit of a sacrificial victim, but

also of a sacrificing priest. By the first we are consecrated and dedicated to God in the capacity of perpetual victims before the Most High, and we receive certain infused supernatural dispositions which correspond to the obligations of our state of victim. By the second, our will, assisted by divine grace, recognizes the reality of this state of victim as one proper and essential to us, loves the obligations appertaining to it, and performs with exactitude the supernatural actions that are the fulfilment of the duties imposed on us by this state of victim.

Such then is the twofold spirit we received at the baptismal font. It is the very spirit of Jesus Christ, who was also Himself at once the priest and the victim in the sacrifice He offered.

This is why St. Peter, addressing Christians in general, says: "You are a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (I. Pet. ii. 5). These spiritual sacrifices are all the actions which we perform to pay to God the homage due to Him. As St. Augustine says: "Everything that we do for the purpose of uniting ourselves to God in a hallowed union, directing our intention to Him, the sovereign Good, the source of all happiness, is really and truly a sacrifice."

Thus in virtue of our baptism all Christians are truly priests. This is the reason why St. Jerome spoke of that sacrament as the *ordination of the laity*. It is not necessary to add that if this dignity has been conferred on us, it does not give us the right to celebrate, in the Church of God, the sacrifice of the great, the one only and supreme victim of the whole world, Our Lord Jesus Christ. To assert this would be a heresy, since that privilege belongs solely to those who have received Holy Orders. But we are priests in the sense that by corresponding faithfully to the grace of our baptism we sacrifice ourselves continually to the glory of God, immolating our unruly pas-

sions by perpetual mortification, and giving ourselves, of our own free will, to be consumed in a furnace of charity that burns with ever-increasing ardor.

The illustrious Bishop of Ravenna, St. Peter Chrysologus, extols this mystic priesthood in these eloquent words: "St. Paul speaks to all Christians when he says: 'I beseech you by the mercy of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God' (Rom. xii. 1). In thus beseeching all men the Apostle raises all (in a certain sense) to the sacerdotal dignity. 'I beseech you,' he says, 'to present your bodies a living sacrifice.' O wondrous, unheard-of exercise of the Christian pontificate! Behold, man is at once his own victim, his own priest. He no longer offers to God, as formerly, a victim foreign to himself. It is he, he himself and all that is in him, which he sacrifices; and thus he alone is in very deed the victim that is immolated and the priest who immolates it. See then, O man, that you are the sacrifice of the Most High, the priest of the Most High, and beware lest you lose the high rank or slight the honor accorded to you by the divine power. Take to yourself the sacerdotal insignia and offer your sacrifice. Put on the stole of sanctity; gird your loins with the girdle of chastity. Let Christ Himself be the covering of your head, His cross your safeguard. Take the censer of prayer, take the sword of the Spirit and go forth! Your own heart is the altar; thus in all confidence offer to God the sacrifice of yourself."

These are eloquent words, and they apply to all Christians; yet all Christians are not bound to observe them strictly. As we have said that they may be imperfect as victims, without offending almighty God, so we say that they may be imperfect in their capacity of sacrificers without opposing His holy will. They do in fact immolate themselves, yet not completely and entirely; they offer a sacrifice, but their sacrifice is not without reserve; and since it was not the will of divine Wisdom to lay upon

them all the obligations of offering a perfect and unrestricted oblation of themselves, those who do not go so far as this commit no sin.

But with the Religious it is otherwise. He desires to become a perfect victim, he desires to become a perfect priest. This is the end and aim of his glorious vocation, the object of his aspirations and his efforts. He knows this to be his duty. During the time of his novitiate he multiplies his sacrifices fervently, lovingly. For him that period of probation is nothing but a long and blissful exercise of the sacerdotal power conferred on him in baptism, and which ought, day by day, to become more perfect. And when the memorable event of his profession approaches, he rejoices in the knowledge that on that day he will be consecrated as a mystic priest, he will be empowered to accomplish the entire immolation of himself with greater solemnity, more abundant grace, and bind himself absolutely and forever as a holocaust on the altar of burnt-offering. After that happy day, after that irrevocable consecration, after that all-embracing immolation, everything will serve as a sword whereby in some way to renew his sacrifice every moment, to dedicate afresh his life as a victim. The observance of the sacred vows, offering an almost infinite variety of occasions for self-sacrifice—the holy Rule, the usages of the cloister by which everything is provided for, even the slightest emotions of the soul—the duties to be discharged, as well as the minutest injunctions to be obeyed, the trials of community life, infirmities, sickness, finally death itself—each and all of these will be a sword to be employed in consummating his sacrifice, all will act as a devouring flame that shall consume the victim and reduce it to ashes.

Such are the dispositions of the true Religious who is faithful to his vocation. In the following chapter we shall show the sanctity and excellence of the state into which his mystic priesthood admits him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXCELLENCE OF THE SACRIFICE WHICH THE MONK OR NUN OFFERS TO GOD.

THE excellence of the sacrifice which the Religious offers to God is due to the fact that he is himself the victim therein offered; thus his sacrifice appears to us the most valuable, the most honorable, the most comprehensive that can be offered. The wise and judicious Bourdaloue expresses the same thought. We will here take him as our guide and quote his words.

1. The sacrifice which the Religious makes of himself is the most valuable oblation. I term it the most valuable oblation, not as being so actually and intrinsically, but relatively, in respect to him who makes it. Looking at myself such as I am, looking into the depths of my being, I see that I am nothing. I can do nothing. I ought to count myself as nothing; yet, after all, this nothing is all that is most dear to me, since it is my own self, and to every created being nothing is so dear to him, after God, as his own self. Therefore, in giving myself, I give the greatest and best gift that it is in my power to give. Abraham once received the divine command to slay his son Isaac; immediately he prepared to obey the behest. Without hesitation, without a murmur, he ascended the mountain indicated to him by the divine command, with the purpose of accomplishing the sacrifice which was to cost him so dear. We know the sequel and what was the reward of his heroic obedience.

Now, without endeavoring to minimize in any way a sacrifice the merit of which Holy Scripture extols so highly, and which God recompensed so munificently, it is nevertheless true that Abraham, in sacrificing Isaac, did not sacrifice himself; and we must ever bear in mind the Gospel maxim that there is no sacrifice like that of laying down one's life for one's friends, of giving one's self. And here it is that the Religious has an inestimable advantage. He immolates himself, he immolates himself wholly and entirely. He immolates his body, according to the words of St. Augustine: "We sacrifice our body when we mortify it by abstinence, if we do so with the intention of pleasing God." He immolates his soul also, and on this point the holy Doctor of the Church adds: "But if the body of which the soul makes use as a tool, a slave, is a sacrifice, provided the soul offers to God the work done at His bidding, how much the more ought we to declare the soul to be a sacrifice when she offers herself to God, in order that, kindled by love of Him, she may strip herself of all earthly concupiscence, and be renewed, as it were, by her subjection to the infinite and immutable Deity."

We are therefore warranted in saying that the sacrifice offered by the Religious is the most precious oblation in God's sight.

2. It is also the sacrifice whereby the greatest honor is rendered to the majesty of the Most High. How is that? For this very reason that it is the most valuable offering. It is in fact obvious that the costly nature of the victim gives its value to the sacrifice, and in proportion to the worth of the sacrifice is the honor thereby rendered to Him to whom it is offered. Under the Old Law the fruits of the earth, the blood of bulls and of goats, were offered to God. He did not refuse to receive these oblations; He was graciously pleased to accept them; but, what think you, were victims such as those worthy of Him,

worthy of the Supreme Being? He Himself, in fact, expressly intimated to His prophet that sacrifices of so inadequate a nature were insufficient to satisfy the requirements of His justice. What is it, then, that the God to whom all things belong desires of us? That which He desires of us, which He expects from us, is that we should be ourselves the victim of our own sacrifice; and it is this desire, this expectation which St. Paul formulates, when he says: "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service," thus rendering to Him a spiritual homage.

Platus, in his work "On the Happiness of the Religious Life," dwells on these words of the Apostle, saying: "I consider that the nature and dignity of this interior holocaust is well described by St. Paul when he terms it 'a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, a reasonable service.' He asserts indeed by these words that it is not flesh and blood alone which is offered in sacrifice but what is more, the will and the reason. He terms this offering a sacrifice, because the victim must needs be slain; but he adds the word living, to express the fact that this death is not of a kind which takes away life, but on the contrary preserves it in a wondrous and admirable manner. Finally, he declares the sacrifice to be holy and pleasing unto God, because of all that this earth can offer, nothing is so acceptable to Him as the soul which immolates herself for His glory. And indeed, if the burnt-offerings of the Old Dispensation were of a sweet odor before Him, although only the flesh of a heifer or some other animal was offered to His divine Majesty, how much nobler, how much more meritorious, and consequently of how much sweeter an odor must the sacrifice be which we make of our heart and of our soul!"

Now that is the offering made by the Religious in his

sacrifice of himself, the offering which gives most honor to the most high God.

3. It is at the same time the most comprehensive oblation. The Religious gives himself, sacrifices himself wholly and unreservedly; wholly and entirely in the present, at the moment of his self-immolation—wholly and entirely for all time to come. Who can fail to admire the comprehensiveness of this sacrifice which comprises all that he who surrenders himself, who immolates himself, can call his own, and extends to every moment of his life.

There are three kinds of possessions: the gifts of fortune, bodily endowments, and the powers of the will. They are all sacrificed; the gifts of fortune by the vow of poverty—bodily endowments by the vow of chastity—the powers of the will by the vow of obedience. And if the Religious interprets his vows not merely in a literal and limited sense, but in the spirit and with the supernatural dispositions they are intended to produce (and at that he ought to aim, as we shall explain later on, unless he would render nugatory the engagements he has entered upon); if the Religious is truly poor both exteriorly and interiorly; if he carries chastity so far as to mortify all his senses and all his concupiscences; if his obedience is implicit and unreserved, then the excellence, the sanctity, the sublimity of his self-surrender is beyond the power of words to express. He is dead and yet he lives; he is dead to all that is human, he lives to and for God alone. "It is a strange, a marvelous thing," says Platus, "this union of real death with actual and true life, a union which was not to be found in the sacrifices of old, but which is present in our sacrifice. As St. Paul tells us: 'You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God'" (Col. iii. 3). Thus death does not deprive the victim of life, the true, supernatural life, nor does that life prevent his death; because if death did not intervene the holocaust would be no real one,

and if his life were ended, he could not belong to God and serve Him in future. But here life and death are united and bound up together, and thus, as St. Gregory the Great remarks, on the one hand there is in very deed a victim who is slain, the Religious who dies to the world, and on the other there is a living victim, the self-same individual who is thenceforth devoted to the service of God.

O happy state, that of a Religious dedicated, consecrated to God! The altar's hallowed flame penetrates every fiber of his being; there is nothing left in him that is not an actuating principle for the praise and glory of God; one might almost say that he participates already in the state of the redeemed in heaven, for there, as the Fathers tell us, the elect are inflamed with the sacred fire of the Holy Spirit and have found their perfect consummation as victims that have been slain. As yet the outward semblance is that of earth, but the inner life is all celestial, all divine.

Moreover, the comprehensiveness of the sacrifice made by the Religious is apparent in that it not only embraces all that he possesses, but extends to every moment of his life. "For," as Bourdaloue says, "the sacrifice of those who go into Religion is not like ordinary sacrifices, which are over in a short space of time, and are ended directly by the complete consumption of the victim. The Religious, although offered in sacrifice and slain upon the altar, does not cease to exist, and may have a long life before him, and this signal privilege is his—he is able to renew his sacrifice day by day." He does in fact renew it by every action he performs, and this is so either because obedience is the rule and actuating motive of his least and slightest work, or because in virtue of his vows all his actions may be regarded as sacred actions; or again, because his state being fixed by his profession, and he himself bound upon the altar of sacrifice, he can not, with-

out prevarication, without what almost resembles apostasy, perform any acts except those that are in keeping with his character of victim; acts, that is, of perpetual self-surrender. "For," Bourdaloue continues, "to be a victim, I mean a victim for God, one whose state is that of a victim, is to be no longer one's own, no longer to dispose of one's self, no longer to have any right over one's self or to claim any such right; it is to be solely and entirely in God's hands, to be dependent on Him alone, to act only in conformity with God's commands and His adorable will, whatever the medium, whatever the manner whereby He may choose to make them known to us. It is, in fact, to be in a state of death, and like one who is dead; to be passive in the hands of others; to be directed, governed, made use of according to God's good pleasure and that of those whom He has placed in authority over us; so that day by day we may say with the Apostle: 'Lord, for Thy sake we are put to death all the day long;' at every moment we are counted, we count ourselves 'as sheep for the slaughter'" (Rom. viii. 36).

Well indeed for the Religious if he can take this view of his state: I am a victim of my God. This thought will be capable of inspiring him with fortitude to bear the yoke of the Rule, however irksome it may be, and whatever the effort it requires of him. Thus sustained, what is not the soul of the monk or nun prepared to undertake and to endure? If she is required to pray, to prolong her vigils, to labor, to humiliate, to mortify herself at the cost of her rest, her health, her inclinations, whatever, in short, it may cost her, nothing disconcerts her if she bears in mind the fact that it is precisely in these things that she is a victim. And she is all the more impressed by this, her character of sacrificial victim, when she sees how many unhappy sinners sacrifice themselves to their ambition and to their pleasures, how many sacrifice themselves to the

world which tyrannizes over them and ruins them; while inasmuch as she is the victim of God, the victim of charity, she sacrifices herself for duty, for the perfection which is her aim, for her own salvation, for the crown of eternal felicity that is laid up for her and to merit which she exerts herself to the utmost.

Such is the excellence of our sacrifice, and the beauty, the perfection of our vocation; that excellence and that perfection are, however, but too little known. Were they known as they ought to be, would there be so many tepid, faint-hearted souls in a state so holy? a state worthy of heaven rather than of earth?

The subject of the next chapter is calculated to enable us to take a yet higher view of the religious state, and form a more exalted idea of its sublimity.

CHAPTER V.

THE FERVENT RELIGIOUS MERITS TO BE ENTITLED A MARTYR. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THIS APPELLATION AND THAT OF VICTIM.

The martyrs have always been regarded as the most perfect victims; doubtless on account of the close resemblance between their death and the death of Our Lord, the most adorable of victims, who died upon the cross and shed His blood out of love for man. Origen, one of the earliest Fathers of the Church, dwelling on the fact that all Christians are victims, and dividing them into different classes, puts martyrs in the first and foremost rank. *Prima martyrum hostia.* St. Cyprian, another Father of equal celebrity, who lived in the middle of the third century, addresses inspiriting words to several bishops and priests who were condemned for the faith of Christ to labor in the mines. These holy confessors of the faith deemed themselves objects of compassion because they were deprived of the privilege of offering the sacrifice of Christ's body and blood. Writing to them the saintly bishop says:

"No, beloved brethren, do not imagine that your piety, your faith will suffer by reason of your inability any longer to celebrate and offer the divine mysteries. You do indeed celebrate the holy sacrifice, you offer to God an oblation at once precious and glorious; an oblation which will contribute largely to enable you to obtain an

eternal reward, since Holy Scripture declares and affirms that an afflicted spirit is a sacrifice to God, and that He doth not despise a contrite and humbled heart. That, therefore, is the sacrifice you offer to God, the sacrifice at which you never cease to officiate by night or by day, because you are yourselves the victims of your God, and you present yourselves before Him as holy and spotless victims, conformably to the Apostle's exhortation: 'I beseech you, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing unto God.'"

Such is the language in which the holy bishop speaks to the martyrs. In his eyes they are victims before God, and such complete victims are they, so pleasing is their sacrifice to His divine Majesty, that they have no cause to regret being prevented from offering the adorable Victim, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Moreover holy Church says in the office of martyrs: "The Lord hath tried His elect, as gold in the furnace hath He proved them, and like burnt-offerings hath He accepted them."

This constitutes the glory of the martyrs. They are victims offered to God; and their holocaust is of a sweet savor, like that of an eternal burnt-offering.

Now Religious are also victims for God, and perfect victims. This is the first point in which they resemble the holy martyrs. There is another and more striking one which we must consider and gaze upon with admiration. But here the matter is so abundant, though the subject at first sight appears sterile, as to be positively perplexing. We would fain quote the spiritual writers, because it is meet to give place to the eminent servants of God, as often as possible, allowing them to speak, and those who are enlightened from on high are many in number. The early Fathers of the desert, the Doctors of the Church and more recent writers who treat this subject, not only,

strange as it may appear, concur in asserting that the fervent Religious may be compared to a martyr, but even for the most part give the Religious precedence over the martyr. Among those of whom we speak we may mention St. Antony, St. John Climacus, St. Paphnutius, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, Thomas à Kempis, Rodriguez, Platus, St. Teresa, St. Francis of Sales.[1]

However, lest we should, so to speak, leave the reader to suffer dearth while in the midst of plenty, we will select a few of what in our opinion appear to be the most striking passages in the writings of these holy authors, and cite almost in its entirety the eleventh instruction of

[1] Although we do not quote St. Bernard's words, we can not refrain from relating an incident taken from his life which illustrates, far better than words could do, the opinion and sentiments of that holy monk. He happened one day to meet a crowd who were following a notorious criminal led out to execution. Suddenly, obeying an inspiration from above, the saint forced his way through the throng, and falling at the feet of the executioners, implored them to deliver their prisoner into his hands, declaring that he would put him to death, and that by a far more lingering and painful process than was then awaiting him. All the bystanders were astonished at hearing what he said, and their ruler, Prince Thibaud, was summoned, since he alone was authorized to decide whether this singular request was to be granted. On his arrival the prince, thinking that St. Bernard wished the criminal to be pardoned, began to enumerate the atrocious crimes of which he was guilty, and for which he was sentenced to the gallows. Thereupon the saint answered with a smile: "I am perfectly aware of all you tell me, and it is precisely on that account that I ask you to give the malefactor up to me. My purpose is to make him suffer death not once but many times in atonement for all his evil deeds." This being so, his wish was complied with; the criminal was pardoned, and St. Bernard conducted him to his monastery to make him a monk. The sequel proves that the saint's hope was not disappointed; for thirty years the man persevered in the religious life with exemplary fervor, and thus, dying daily, he in reality suffered a thousand deaths instead of one.

Thomas à Kempis to his novices. He takes as his text these words: Lord, "for Thy sake we are killed all day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter" (Ps. xliii. 22), and expounds them as follows:

"Pay great heed, my dear brethren, to the words you have just heard. Although they were uttered by the prophetic lips of the Psalmist long before you were born, they are none the less intended to afford you, at the present time, most salutary instruction.

"O my dear brethren, you who are in religion, who live under the rule of obedience, if you fulfil your vows faithfully you are martyrs, or at any rate you may become martyrs through the sufferings of each day. As many times as you devote your powers to the performance of your daily work, so many times a fresh crown is allotted you as the reward of your labor. And if, stripped of all self-will, you offer staunch resistance to your sensual inclinations, God will give you abundant consolation.

"A Religious living under obedience, resolved to break his own will, endeavoring to execute the will of his Superior in all humility, will become, in a spiritual sense, a real martyr, although he is not called upon to bare his neck to the executioner's blade. And he who every day of his life seeks to be perfectly mortified, practising obedience with simplicity of heart, imitates the example of Abraham, who raised no objection when commanded to bind his only son Isaac, to slay him and offer him as a burnt-offering.

"We read of the holy martyrs that it was through various kinds of tortures that they reached the kingdom of heaven. The option as to the sort of death or torture they were to suffer was not even left to them, yet with perfect resignation to the decrees of divine Providence they offered themselves body and soul to their Creator, ready to endure any and every kind of torment. Thus,

when any one of you receives from his Superior's lips a command diametrically opposed to his own will, and nevertheless prepares to obey that command implicitly, from the moment when he forces himself to do violence to himself and suppresses, stifles the murmur that rises to his lips, he sacrifices to God, upon the altar of his own heart, a victim which is well pleasing to Him. Conquering himself, he gains a triumphant victory over the enemy after the same manner as did the martyrs.

"You have often read in the Acts of those glorious confessors an account of the bodily torments inflicted on them. They yielded their members to the most cruel tortures. And it behooves you likewise to chastise your body by fasting, vigils, silence, and manual labor.

"When any one has got so far as to regard as sweet what is bitter, to accept contumely as honor, to bear affliction as something pleasurable, then indeed does one truly share with the martyrs Our Lord's chalice; then need one no longer dread the scathing flames of a future life; then may one entertain the hope, the firm and blissful hope, of being one day admitted to the company of the saints.

"It was by meditating upon the everlasting pains of hell that the martyrs obtained courage to bear the keenest torture as if it were a thing of little moment, and made choice of the strait and narrow gate through which to pass into the boundless realms of the kingdom of heaven. [And this is what fervent Religious do who are really worthy of the name they bear.]

"Each one, in his own Order, may gain the martyr's palm by a devout and pious life. He will succeed in doing so if he generously resists his evil propensities, prays for his enemies, displays sufficient constancy to preserve inviolate the fair flower of chastity; if, following Our Lord's example, he is obedient even unto death; if in everything

he seeks the good pleasure of God, and sacrifices his own will; if, finally, he desires always to have less rather than more of the good things of this world, and that which is needful for the support of this present life.

"In fact holy poverty, voluntary poverty, is looked upon in the light of a martyrdom. To the poor in spirit, even as to the martyr, the kingdom of heaven is promised, is given by Our Lord.

"In like manner, when silence is imposed upon a tongue that loves to speak, when one forbids it to address a word either to one's fellow-Religious or to externes, it is equivalent to binding it tightly with a cord, a species of torture which many a martyr had to endure.

"And when a subject who is fond of walking, and likes to go hither and thither, is forbidden to leave the monastery, when he is even told to remain quietly in his cell, it is the same as if, with holy violence, his feet were made fast in the stocks, another torture inflicted on the martyrs.

"When a Religious who is prone to curiosity closes his eyes that he may not behold the vain things of time and sense, he will receive the same recompense as the saints whose eyes were torn out by order of cruel tyrants. And when one who has a tendency to indolence and loves to be at rest, is made to work hard, if he obeys the orders given him in a docile spirit he will receive the reward given to the holy martyrs, whose wrists were laden with chains and their limbs stretched upon the rack.

"A virtuous and obedient brother ought therefore to consider that his bodily powers are no longer his own to dispose of as he lists; they are in the power of his Superior, to whom he has voluntarily subjected himself for the love of God, promising to conform in everything, even in his every undertaking, his every act, to whatever his Superior may ordain for the good of his soul. By thus doing he will rank with the martyrs, he will receive the

palm his patience has merited, and the crown of eternal life through the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen."

Thus the devout à Kempis exhorts his novices. So excellent an instruction might well be enough for us; but we can not forego the advantage of hearing what St. Francis of Sales says on this subject.

The nuns who formed the first community of the Visitation have handed down to us in writing the following words from the lips of their holy founder:

"My desire for you, my dear daughters, is that you should be mortified; that you should live day and night in the spirit of interior sacrifice and complete abandonment to the will of God, which will serve you in the stead of disciplines, fasts, and hair shirts.

"The martyrs drank the sacred chalice of the Passion at one draught; some in a single hour, others in two or three days, others again in the course of a month. As for ourselves, we may be martyrs and drink that chalice not indeed in two or three days, but throughout the whole course of our life, by continually mortifying ourselves as all monks and nuns do, as it behooves those to do whom God has called to enter religion with the intention of bearing His cross, of being crucified with Him. Is not this, in very deed, the greatest of martyrdoms—never to do one's own will, constantly to submit one's own judgment to that of others, to flay one's heart, to empty it of all manner of impure affections, of all that is not God; to live not in accordance with one's own fancies and inclinations, but in accordance with reason, in accordance with the divine Will? That is a martyrdom which is all the more meritorious because it is a slow, a lifelong martyrdom. But if we persevere, and are faithful to our vocation, when it is ended we shall obtain a glorious crown, after having crucified ourselves with Our Lord by the unflinching sup

pression of all within ourselves which might be displeasing in His sight; and in order to stimulate us to this, to encourage us in it, He vouchsafes to prove to us that He died for love of us. While still hanging on the cross, He permitted a soldier to wound His side with a spear, and pierce His Sacred Heart, so that it might be seen that He was really dead, and that He died of love, the love of His Sacred Heart for man."

Such are St. Francis' words. We do not know of any other founder of an Order who laid so much stress on the necessity of life as a victim in the religious state, as did the saintly Founder of the Visitation. His spiritual daughters know this; and they do not forget that the subject which he proposed in the Book of Customs for their meditation on the eve of their profession is this: "The Flaying Alive of the Victim." What rigor this displays, united to incomparable gentleness!

CHAPTER VI.

A CLOSER CONSIDERATION OF THE TITLE OF RELIGIOUS. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THIS TITLE AND THAT OF VICTIM.

The name and title of Religious is given to one who is specially pledged to the practise of the virtue of religion.

Religion, in the sense in which it is here used, may be regarded from two several points of view, that is to say, either in particular, as a virtue distinct from the other virtues, or in general, as a virtue comprising all other virtues.

Inasmuch as it is a particular virtue, it is thus defined by St. Thomas: Religion is an interior and supernatural habit of the soul which inclines us to render to God the worship due to Him.

Regarded as a general virtue, it comprises the theological and at the same time the moral virtues. The teaching of the Angelic Doctor is expressed in these precise terms: "Religion is a profession of faith, hope, and charity, by means of which man is brought primarily into relationship with God; and it calls into exercise all the other virtues, such as mercy and temperance. According to these words of St. James: 'Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation, and to keep one's self unspotted from this world'" (James i. 27).

Religion, understood in this latter sense, takes in the

whole Christian life, either because it directs the intention of all moral virtue to God, its rightful end; or because the acts proper to religion, the worship of God in truth and verity, necessitate many fundamental virtues such as faith, hope, charity, humility, etc.

Hence it results, as a natural consequence, that every Christian really worthy of the name, that is to say, one who conscientiously keeps the commandments, and who, therefore, practises the Christian virtues in the degree required of him, may justly be called a Religious. He has, in all truth and justice, every right to this title. It seems, however, more natural to apply this appellation exclusively to those persons who aim at the attainment of Christian perfection. As St. Thomas wisely remarks: "If anything may be predicated of many persons, those individuals have the principal claim to it who possess it in the highest degree, or who practise it in its perfection."

This remark clearly demonstrates how rightly the name of Religious is given to those persons who are so happy as to have consecrated themselves to God in an Order or Congregation approved by the Church; it also explains why entering an Order or Congregation thus approved is termed "going into religion." Thus we say of the member of an Order, he or she has been so many years in religion, his or her name in religion is this or that.

But if we keep to the strict sense of the word as denoting a special and distinct virtue, we shall find another reason, and a more weighty one, perhaps, for acknowledging that persons who are consecrated to God by vows may legitimately be entitled Religious.

Religion, as we have already said, is the virtue that induces us to pay to God the homage due to Him. Now there is one act which, as Father de Condren asserts, corresponds to all that God is; and that is the act of sacrifice.

Therefore sacrifice is preeminently the act appertaining to the virtue of religion. "By sacrifice," says the illustrious General of the Oratorians, "we acknowledge God as the Supreme Being. We acknowledge Him, in His essential and incomprehensible grandeur and perfection, as being in very truth above all adoration, all love." In this consists the sublimity, the perfection of the act of sacrifice; consequently it comprises in itself all the duty man owes to God. For this reason Our Lord, when He came among us to be Our Redeemer, Our Pattern, was above all and before all a living sacrifice before His heavenly Father—that is to say, a victim and an eternal holocaust to His glory.

Now, as we have seen in the foregoing pages, every soul consecrated to God is also, in union with Our Lord, a victim, a holocaust before God. "You are now," St. Francis of Sales said to a young nun after her profession in the Visitation, "you are now laid upon the sacred altar to be consumed as a whole burnt-offering."

Consequently, in this state, and by the dispositions befitting this state, the soul consecrated to God by vows truly fulfils, in so far as in her lies, all the duties of the virtue of religion. Thus her rightful name, the title that best answers to her state and vocation, is the name, the title of Religious.

When this is once thoroughly apprehended, it is easy to understand why the Church has ordained that the recital of the Breviary should be the primary, the chief, one may almost say the sole task binding on the Religious. Of this the very name of "Office" given to that sacred exercise is sufficient proof. It indicates that the recital of the Breviary is the first and foremost occupation of the Religious, and that whatever may be the spirit of the Order or Institute, whatever are its Rules, whatever the extent and perfection of the vows its members take, there

is one rule, one obligation, which is essential to every Order and common to all Religious: the rule, the obligation of reciting the Divine Office.

It is indisputably true that the performance of that sacred duty does not constitute the religious state; it is the profession which does that. Hence it is also true that an Institute may really be a religious Institute although this particular obligation does not form part of its Rule. It is, however, an obligation so thoroughly in keeping with the essential spirit of every Order, that one can hardly imagine it possible that it should not be in force in every religious Congregation under one form or another. The Canonical Hours, or Greater Office, is the one suited for contemplative Orders; and certainly there is not a single one of those Orders, whether of ancient or more recent origin, in which it is not recited in Choir. The Orders or Congregations who engage in active occupations, such as the education of the young, nursing the sick, etc., have less time to devote to reciting the Breviary, and consequently they are dispensed from it. Yet they have not failed to adopt in its place the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, which we are fully warranted in calling an Office, since it is liturgical, and has all the parts of the Canonical Office with the same rubrics.[1]

Let us listen to Cardinal Bérulle, who so greatly aided the Carmelite nuns to establish themselves in France. Speaking to those worthy daughters of St. Teresa about the excellence of the Divine Office, and the connection between the practise of reciting it and the character of vic-

[1] Some Congregations recite the Rosary. We consider that this may be regarded as replacing, in the intention of the Church, the Canonical Office or the Office of Our Lady; on that account it is desirable that it should be recited in Latin, not in the vernacular, agreeably to the Book *Superni*, issued by Pope Pius V. relative to the Office of the Blessed Virgin.

tim, he says: "The Choir is the most important, most sacred portion of your convent; it is there you spend the greatest part of your time, and you are employed when there in your principal undertaking, the most elevated of your actions, the most delightful of your occupations.

"There you give your whole attention to the Divine Office, which belongs to you of right as a holy people consecrated unto God, as victims slain and yet living. This Office is divine, it is called divine, for it is ordained by divine authority and ought to be celebrated divinely—that is to say, by souls who are divinized, and the object of its recital is the glory of the divine Majesty of God Himself. Therefore perform your task with perfect dispositions, dispositions worthy of your vocation, worthy of the Office itself, worthy of the sovereign Majesty of the God to whom you render this tribute of praise, a tribute due from human nature to its God and its Saviour. And as in the human body the heart and the tongue stand in close relationship to each other in the order of nature, so in the order of grace the same harmony ought to exist between them. The heart ought to feel what the tongue formulates, and fix its thoughts on Him to whom the words uttered are addressed. Mind and body are both employed in this act, for it is offered to the God who created the mind and fashioned the body with His own hands. It is, moreover, the sacrifice of praise which the Holy Spirit calls on us to offer in the words: 'Offer to God the sacrifice of praise' (Psalm xix. 14). It is the perpetual sacrifice to which the Apostle refers when he exhorts us: 'Let us offer the sacrifice of praise always to God' (Heb. xiii. 15). It is the sacrifice of which you yourselves are the victims, since you reduce yourselves to the state of a burnt-offering by the abnegation of self, and to the state of a sacrifice of thanksgiving by your lifelong vocation, and by a general desire that there should

be nothing in you which does not tend to the praise and glory of God. It is a sacrifice of incense and of myrrh, incense as regards the mind, myrrh as regards the body. In it mind and body are the oblation offered, by the oblivion of all earthly things, by the elevation of your whole self to God, by fixing your thoughts on God, and eliminating all but divine affections, celestial aspirations."

So far the pious Cardinal. To his mind the Religious, when he recites his Office as he ought, is truly a whole burnt-offering before God, fulfilling all the duties which are due to the Creator on our part. He is really a burnt-offering, because in this one act he attains all the ends of a sacrifice, which are: adoration, thanksgiving, supplication, expiation. Each and all of these acts are to be found in the Divine Office, in the psalms and canticles, the versicles, antiphons, and prayers. He may indeed say with the prophet Osee that he "will render the calves of our lips" (Osee xiv. 3); with David that he continually "offers to Him the sacrifice of praise" (Psalm cxv. 17); thus complying with the exhortation of St. Paul: "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise always to God, that is to say, the fruit of lips confessing His name" (Heb. xiii. 15).

Justly, therefore, may we term the soul who is consecrated to God a Religious, that is, according to the etymology of the word, one who is bound anew, doubly bound to God. That soul was bound, as we all were, to God in baptism; but by her profession she is bound to God, bound to worship Him, to praise Him, to glorify Him in a fresh and very special manner. Many writers have asserted that those individuals who take the vows of religion are so many temples dedicated to the Most High; and Platus, speaking on this subject, points out that as sacrifices are offered to God in a temple, so the Religious daily offers up to Heaven a great number of sacrifices, such as hymns of praise, thanksgivings, loving ejacu-

lations, acts of contrition, pious aspirations of all kinds. What a glorious vocation is his! How great an honor God confers on him in calling him to this holy, this special service! His functions, his office do in very truth appertain more to heaven than to earth. In these, even in this exile, he enters on what will be his eternal employment in heaven, where all the angels and saints are victims of praise unceasingly offered up to God, immolated for His love, absorbed into His unity. "Blessed," the Psalmist says, "are they that dwell in Thy house, O Lord; they shall praise Thee forever and ever" (Psalm lxxxiii. 5). And to this St. Augustine adds: "There we shall all praise Our God; we shall all be one in one Christ to the glory of the one God." [1]

[1] St. Augustine in Psalm cxlvii.—*Ibi laudabimus omnes; unus in uno ad unum erimus.*

CHAPTER VII.

THE SOUL OF THE RELIGIOUS IS THE TRUE SPOUSE OF JESUS CHRIST; AND IT IS IN HER SACRIFICE OF HERSELF THAT HER UNION WITH HIM IS EFFECTED.

THE title of spouse is indisputably one of the most beautiful that can be given to the Religious, because it expresses the wondrous union that exists between Our Lord and the devout soul. We shall proceed to show how perfectly correct and legitimate that title is, and the connection between the appellation of spouse and that of victim.

St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says: "I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God, for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (II. Cor. xi. 2). How beautiful are those words, and how full of mystery! The biblical exegetes expound them thus: "Behold the singular nobility of the Christian soul. By faith, by baptism, she becomes the mystic spouse of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The kingdom of heaven is the dowry of this bride, and as her bridegroom is a king, the dignity of a queen is in store for her. The nuptials are prepared for her here below by faith, hope, and charity; but the union will receive its final consummation in heaven, through the beatific vision of God, through love made perfect."

Thus Our Lord is the true Bridegroom, and chaste and faithful souls are His true spouses. He is their Consort,

as He is their Father, their Brother, their Friend, their King. In Him all social and domestic relations have their highest type and pattern. So that, as there are earthly husbands, so Jesus is our Husband, and the vast distance which separates the creature from his Creator is the measure of the difference between that title when applied to man and when applied to Christ. That title, borne by Him, is real and true; borne by man, it is a mere shadow of the reality. The same may be said of the designation of spouse which is given to chaste souls. As far as the heavens are above the earth, so far are those souls, in virtue of this glorious character, raised above the spouses of this world, however high their rank, be it that of princesses.

Moreover, how touching are the eulogiums pronounced by the Fathers and holy Doctors of the Church on the union of Christ with the faithful soul. As we peruse them we are filled with astonishment, with delight. Origen, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Basil, St. Bernard, St. Laurence Justinian, each and all of these have in their turn extolled the marvelous condescension of the Eternal Word toward His lowly creatures, and the ineffable happiness He confers on them. St. Bernard takes this subject as the theme of whole discourses, and St. Laurence Justinian composed an entire treatise, thus entitled: "On the Mystic and Chaste Nuptials of the Eternal Word with the Soul of Man." This need not surprise us, however, since, as Bossuet declared, the intimate relations between God and the soul find expression in all the books of Holy Scripture, symbolized by the union of husband and wife.

The same writer says elsewhere: "The name of spouse is the sweetest name wherewith Jesus Christ can ennoble the souls whom He elevates to His sacred love; nor could He choose a name for Himself better fitted than that of

husband to express His love for the soul, and the reciprocal love she ought to have for Him."

Happy then, a thousand times happy is the soul who by the innocence of her life justly merits that title of spouse of Christ.

Among the souls thus privileged, the Religious occupy the foremost rank. Such is the opinion of all the holy Doctors. St. Bernard says expressly: "Although the souls of all the just are the spouses of the Lord, yet the virgins consecrated to God are so in a very special sense." A Father of more ancient date, St. Fulgentius, gives this name of spouse preeminently to consecrated virgins. Finally, let us quote the beautiful and significant words of St. Augustine: "Those who consecrate their virginity to God by vow are thereby on the one hand raised to a high position of honor and dignity in the Church, and on the other hand they are not without their bridal hour, since they participate in the espousals of the whole Church, whose Bridegroom is Christ."

But without seeking any further confirmation from the holy Doctors and Fathers, we will keep to what we find in the Roman Pontifical for the ceremony of the consecration of virgins. Nothing is more touching, nothing appeals more powerfully to our admiration than this ceremony, of which we will follow the various stages.

The priest thus addresses the officiating bishop: "Right Rev. Father, the holy Catholic Church, our Mother, requests that you will deign to bless these virgins here present, to consecrate them, and betroth them to Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the most high God." The bishop replies: "With the help of God, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we elect these virgins here present, to bless them, consecrate them, and betroth them to Jesus Christ our Lord, the Son of the most high God."

Then the virgins are called upon to come forward, and

the bishop says to them: "Do you desire to be blessed, consecrated, and affianced to Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the most high God?" The virgins answer: "That is our desire." The religious habits, the veils and wreaths are then blessed, and a preface is chanted from which we give a few extracts:

"Among the virtues of which Thou art the Author, O Lord, in the children whom Thou hast begotten not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, but of Thy spirit, Thou hast of Thine inexhaustible bounty infused into some souls a gift of a higher character. Without lessening in any wise the dignity wherewith Thou hast endowed the marriage bond, and while maintaining in its integrity the benediction Thou gavest from the first to that hallowed union, Thou hast ordained that there should be souls of a higher type, who, renouncing all desire for the bond Thou didst institute between man and woman, should be called to the realization of the mystery represented by that bond; who, foregoing voluntarily all earthly nuptials, should aspire with all the fervor of their love to the divine alliance of which marriage on earth is a figure. Those who profess holy virginity know from whom that virtue proceeds, and eager to imitate the purity of the angels, they desire no other bridegroom than Him who is at the same time the Son of an ever-Virgin Mother and the Spouse of those who for His sake take the vow of perpetual chastity."

This idea pervades the whole remainder of the ceremonial. When the bishop gives the veil, he says to the aspirant: "Receive this holy veil, and know that from henceforth and forever thou art the true spouse of Jesus Christ." When he puts the ring on the finger of each consecrated virgin, he says: "Herewith I betroth thee as the spouse of Jesus Christ, the Son of the most high God. Wherefore receive the ring of fidelity, the seal of the Holy

Spirit, so that henceforward thou mayst rightly be called the spouse of God." And the virgin responds by chanting this canticle: "I am the Bride of Him whom the angels serve, whose beauty the sun and moon gaze upon with admiring wonder. The Lord Jesus has put His ring on my finger, He has crowned me in the character of His spouse."

Does not this sound in our ears as an echo of the heavenly canticles? Certainly there is nothing earthly about it. When St. Gertrude pondered upon this divine mystery, when she recalled to mind the favor conferred upon her, the emotion that welled up in her soul found a vent in impassioned language.

"O my Jesus," she exclaimed, "Thou who art the flower, the fruit of the virginal purity of Thy Mother, my rich inheritance and my royal dowry! Thou who hast adorned me beforehand with a ring, the pledge of fidelity, impress upon me the seal of the Holy Spirit, make me what I ought to be for Thee, O immortal Lily, who art my fairest, most precious flower. Bind me to Thyself with a love so ardent, that in my longing to be united to Thee I may thirst for death; grant that the alliance contracted between Thee and me may be of so close a nature that my heart may be taken from me, to be no more in my possession but in Thine, made one with Thee in the indissoluble union of love.

"O Son of God, my love, my love! Make for me a path which leads to Thee, the path of fair love. Drawn toward Thee by the force of a chaste affection, rivetted to Thee by the sweet nuptial bond, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest, to the lofty heights where Thou reignest supreme, and whither Thou dost lead those resplendent choirs composed of myriads of virgins arrayed in garments of snowy whiteness, who with rapturous joy chant the dulcet song of their eternal espousals. O Jesus, one day grant me a place in the ranks of that virginal band.

There I shall quench my thirst at the fount which springs from Thy divine love; I shall be satiated with the enjoyment of Thine ineffable sweetness. Amen. Amen. May every created being echo this cry!"

Such are the utterances, the ecstatic utterances of this saintly virgin. They make known to us her joy, her gratitude, her hopes, and moreover acquaint us with the final, the supreme end of the union of the earthly with the heavenly Spouse, an end infinitely desirable and delightful. But we who listen to this celestial song are still exiles sighing in this valley of tears, and we know full well that if this union is consummated forever in the unclouded vision of the divine Spouse, and the eternal bliss of His presence, the preparation for it here below is accomplished in privations, sufferings, and death. It is St. Francis of Sales, whose loving soul could so well follow the illustrious Gertrude when she winged her swift and blissful flight to her Beloved, it is that gentle saint, I say, who recalls us to the realities of our present life, and reminds us of the conditions indispensable to this divine union.

"The soul of the Religious," he says, "can not be the true spouse of our glorified Lord unless she has been in this life the spouse of our crucified Lord; He will only place the golden crown on the brow of those who have previously worn the crown of thorns. For the cloister is a Calvary where the lovers of the cross are to be found, and where they gladly dwell."

The good Bishop of Geneva's remark brings us back to our main subject: The soul that is the perfect spouse of Jesus Christ must be His perfect victim also; and here we may aptly again quote the beautiful saying of the Ven. Mother Emilie de Rodat: "It is in His character of a victim that Jesus is our Pattern, and it is only by walking in the footsteps of Him who sacrificed Himself for our sake, that we can become His true spouses."

To be united to Our Lord at the nuptial altar and at the sacrificial altar is one and the same thing. And this is the reason why: Because the union of husband and wife is the closest of all unions. Now, above all and before all else, Our Lord is a victim. This He was throughout His whole life, without ceasing to immolate Himself for a single moment; and this He is, and will continue to be in the adorable Sacrament of the Altar until the consummation of ages. The state of a victim is His proper, His essential state. Consequently the soul of the Religious, the spouse of that divine Victim, is also a victim; that state is also her proper, her essential state. The more she strives to merit the name of spouse, the more the alliance she has contracted is brought to completion, the more completely does the soul who participates in that union become a victim. And in like manner the more progress she makes in the way of self-surrender, the more she strives to become perfect in her character of victim, the more perfect she becomes in her character of spouse. Once again I repeat, to be a spouse and to be a victim is one and the selfsame thing.

St. Jerome seems to express the same thought when he says: "Virginity is the holocaust offered to Christ; and I add what is perhaps new to some: chastity is the burnt-offering, the sacrifice in which she herself offers her own self." Yes, indeed, the virgin offers up herself, she is her own priest and the sacrificer of herself. On the day of her profession she offers up herself and solemnly immolates herself, and on that same day Our Lord takes her for His bride. She presents herself to Him as a victim; Jesus gives Himself to her as her spouse. And, desirous in as far as in her lies to merit that title, and conscious that Our Lord will give it to her on that triumphant day, she wishes to do as earthly brides do, who forsake all and give up all, relatives, friends, country, everything in a word most

dear to them; like them she wishes to abandon all, to sacrifice all; and for her to sacrifice all is not only to sacrifice what is external to herself, she must immolate her own self. Let us hear what St. Bernard says on this point: "Since this union of the soul with Jesus Christ ought to be something quite superior to all earthly alliances, God has established a law proportioned to the grandeur and dignity of that union. And what is that law? It is this: The bride of an earthly bridegroom is obliged for his sake to leave her father and mother; the bride of the heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, must, so God has decreed, leave herself. It is only just that, for a Spouse who is God, more should be abandoned than for one who is nothing more than human."

Now this renunciation, this entire stripping of one's self is the perfect sacrifice of the soul of the Religious; and thus it is in every respect true that by sacrifice the most perfect union is effected between the divine Spouse and that soul; and that her state of a victim which has been slain is a condition of the celestial alliance; it is her bridal dowry, the sublime bond that unites her to her Lord.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE DIFFERENT DEGREES OF UNION WITH JESUS, IN HIS CHARACTER OF VICTIM: SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS ON UNION WITH OUR LORD IN GENERAL.

The whole life of the Christian, provided he lives up to the grace of his baptism, tends constantly toward his union with God. That union is his only, his necessary end. The sanctifying grace infused into the soul in baptism is its first stage; the last will only be attained in heaven, for it consists in the clear vision, the beatific possession of God.

But in what does this union with God precisely and positively consist? It consists (and no other hypothesis is admissible), it consists, we repeat, solely in union with Our Lord Jesus Christ; and this is so not only because Our Lord is Himself God, but also because, in His quality of God-Man, He is alone the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the Way, the one and only Way, because it is only through Jesus Christ that we can attain to the union with God. He is the sole Truth, because it is in Him that our union with God is brought about and completed. Finally, He is the Life, because it is the communication which He makes of Himself to us, and whereby He gives life to our souls, which constitutes our union with God.

Thus it is in a very true sense that Jesus Christ, through whom, in virtue of His human and divine nature, we can alone be united to God, is our real and final end. Hence when our union with Him is once effected we need seek

no longer, we have reached our goal. St. Augustine teaches us this truth: "Jesus Christ," he says, "is our ultimate end. And why so? Not because His office is to consume, but to consummate. For to consume is to destroy, whereas to consummate is to make perfect. Therefore Christ is our end; for the more we strive to be united to Him the more we shall be rendered perfect in Him and by Him; our perfection therefore consists in attaining to Him through charity. And when thou shalt have reached Him, seek nothing further: He is thy final end."

These words are full of deep meaning. Not only do they contain a grand doctrinal lesson, they also contain an eminently practical truth. They teach us that throughout the whole course of our spiritual life, both in the early days of our conversion, and at the period when we made solid progress in virtue, as well as later on in the practise of the good works appertaining to the way of perfection, we must never lose sight of Christ, but keep His mysteries, His teaching, His example continually before our eyes. Let us listen to what the saint we have just quoted says expressly after the passage given above: "Just," he says, "as the goal of any journey we make is the place to which we are going, so that when we have reached that place we stop and proceed no farther; in like manner the end and aim of all thy solicitude, of all the projects thou formest, of all the exertions thou dost make, of all the diligence thou dost exercise is He toward whom thou tendest; and when Thou shalt have attained to Him thy desires, thy efforts will be ended, since there is nothing beyond that is better or more desirable than Him. Therefore He has proposed Him to us as our model in this present life, and promises to give Himself to us as our reward in the life that is to come." How lucid, how full of unction is the teaching conveyed in those words!

Jesus is our final end. To be united to Him is to reach the utmost limit of the supernatural life. Therefore to compass that union is the one great concern of our life in this world, and the greater or less degree of perfection in this union depends on the greater or less degree of our progress in the spiritual life toward a state of perfection.

All this is quite plain. Again we repeat: Jesus is before all and above all a victim. This is the principal character in which He appears before His Father, to whom He pays all the homage which is His due, and before men, on whom He bestows both in time and in eternity all the blessings of which they stand in need.

Hence it follows that to be united to Jesus is to be united to Him in His capacity of victim. He is also a teacher, a king. But how could it possibly be imagined that our union with Him, the union which, as we have seen, is the realization of our ultimate end, could be a union with Him in His capacity of teacher or of king? Therefore when we speak of union with Christ, it is equivalent to speaking of union with Him in His state of a victim that has been slain. It is true that He is a priest at the same time as a victim; and it is also true that our union with Him as our final end is also union with Him in His sacerdotal character. And why so? Because we ought to do our part in constituting ourselves burnt-offerings before His Father, and that we can not accomplish without we participate in His priesthood. This is the reason why, as has already been said, every Christian, and preeminently every Religious, is the priest who officiates at the sacrifice of himself. But we give the greater prominence to this idea, that the Christian is united to Christ in his character of a victim rather than in that of a priest, because the limit of his sacerdotal office is to reduce himself to the state of a victim that has been sacrificed; and

it is by reaching that limit through the exercise of His sacerdotal power that Our Lord renders to His Father all the homage that is His due, and confers on mankind all the benefits which they look for from Him.

The inference we have already drawn is therefore self-evident: to unite one's self to Jesus in His character of victim is to unite one's self to Him in the state wherein He is truly our final end, for that is the state in which He is our Way, our Truth, our Life. To strive after union with Jesus, the adorable Victim, is consequently a duty incumbent on every Christian; but to strive after a perfect union is the duty incumbent on every Religious. When theologians assert that every professed Religious is strictly bound to strive after perfection, under pain of mortal sin, they refer implicitly to the perfection of that union. For what perfection can there possibly be apart from Christ crucified, apart from His grace, His mysteries, apart from union with His intentions of self-sacrifice? No, there is all that the Religious needs. Were he to lose sight of this aspect of his state, he would at the same time lose all solace, all strength, and also all glory; for his solace, his strength, his glory consist wholly and solely in this, in his being nailed to the cross with Christ. In fact that which more than all else throws into bright relief the sanctity, the sublimity, the true grandeur of the religious state is that it is of all states the one which renders man most like to Christ crucified. Justly therefore may the three vows of the Religious be compared to the three nails by which our divine Master was fastened to the cross. It would undoubtedly be a glorious martyrdom, one much to be desired by the Christian, to be fastened to the cross of the Redeemer with the same nails wherewith His sacred hands and feet were transfixed. Now the Religious enjoys that privilege. By his profession he is brought into closer proximity to Christ crucified

than he could be by the use of the identical instruments by means of which death was inflicted on Our Lord's body. The real cross of the Saviour is His complete self-renunciation, the comprehensiveness of His sacrifice. And it is on this cross that every Religious must in turn lay himself, as upon an altar whereon the oblation of the Lamb of God is renewed and perpetuated until the end of time; and there, by taking the three vows, he undergoes that mystic death of the soul which enables him to live a new life in that of his risen Lord.

Let us proceed to consider the different degrees of perfection which there may be in the union of the soul of the monk or nun with Our Lord in His character of a victim.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE UNION OF THE SOUL OF THE RELIGIOUS WITH JESUS CHRIST IN THE OBLATION HE OFFERED.

The soul of the Religious, the spouse of the Lamb that was slain, deems nothing worthy of her attention in comparison with Jesus, consumed by the flame of love for us upon the altar. She passes in thought from the mystery of His oblation of Himself to that of His immolation on the sacrificial altar, or to some other, also connected with His life as a victim. She dwells on the minutest details of these mysteries, she makes it her constant study to acquaint herself with their spirit, she applies to herself the sublime lessons they contain; her chief endeavor is to enter into the sentiments which are revealed to her gaze in her Beloved; that is her life. Like the spouse in the Canticles, she says: "A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved to me; He shall abide between my breasts" (Cant. i. 12). "My Beloved to me, and I to Him" (Cant. ii. 16).

The first mystery bearing upon Our Lord's sacrifice is that of His oblation of Himself in His Mother's womb. It follows that the first degree of union with Jesus in His character of victim is in sharing the mystery of His oblation. But before setting forth what we have to say on this point, it will be well to recall to mind some fundamental ideas concerning Our Lord's sacrifice.

Throughout His whole life our kind and gentle Saviour

was a victim, that is to say, He was, during His whole life, so to speak, in a posture of sacrifice, not only in the mysteries wherein His character of victim was made plainly manifest, as, for instance, in His Passion, but in all the other mysteries, nay, at every moment of His divine life. In the Blessed Virgin's womb, later on at Bethlehem, in Egypt, at Nazareth, even when He was preaching the Gospel to the multitudes, everywhere and always He was a victim before His Father, a victim offered up and slain for the salvation of mankind. This He was not only in virtue of His interior dispositions, but also by His every act, both inward and outward, of reverence for His Father and of love for man.

But although it is true that Our Lord never for a single instant ceased to be really and truly a victim, both as regards His interior disposition and the attitude of His soul, it is also true that His outward state was not always apparently that of a victim. It may even be said that the character of victim was only made manifest in some special mysteries; we refer to His Incarnation, His Passion, His Resurrection, and His Ascension.

And not without good reason was Our Lord's state as a victim only made outwardly apparent in those four mysteries, for since, in the sacrifices of the Old Law (which Our Lord's sacrifice was to accomplish and supersede), there were four parts, i.e., Oblation, Immolation, Transformation, and Participation, it was fitting that in Our Lord's sacrifice also there should be the same four parts to which the principal mysteries of His life should correspond. And this fact will surely elicit our wondering admiration when we observe how, in the mystery of His Incarnation, He presents His oblation, in that of the Passion He immolates Himself, while in His Resurrection He is seen transformed and glorified, and finally in His Ascension He fulfils what was the fourth part of the ancien

sacrifice, the distribution of portions of the victim to the people as communion.

When this is once apprehended, we can enter with greater facility upon our subject, which is to point out how Jesus offered Himself as a victim in His Incarnation, and in what way the soul of the Religious is united to her divine Spouse in this mystery which constitutes the first act in His sacrifice.

We learn from St. Paul that Our Lord offered Himself as a victim in the mystery of His Incarnation. The Apostle thus describes what went on in Our Lord's soul in the first instant of His human existence. Although Jesus possessed the nature of God, and was in the form of God, "He thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. . . . He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 6–8). "Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith [to the Father]: Sacrifice and oblation [under the Old Law] Thou wouldest not; but a body Thou hast fitted to Me [a body which, being united to the divinity, will be a victim worthy of Thy sovereign Majesty]. Holocausts for sin [which were offered to Thee] did not please Thee. Then said I: Behold I come; in the head of the book [of the Law and of the prophets] it is written of Me, that I should do Thy will, O God. In the which will we are sanctified by the oblation of the body of Jesus Christ once" (Heb. x. 5–7, 10).

Such is the account St. Paul gives. Since Jesus is a victim, His first act, on coming into the world, is naturally an act of oblation.

Let the devout soul, therefore, contemplate the sweet Saviour, her Spouse, living in His Mother's womb in the deepest obscurity, the most complete self-annihilation. Let this mystery frequently form the subject of her medi-

tations, the object of her adoration; let it encourage her to make good resolutions. It is thus that the union of the soul to Christ commences. The first act of the faithful spouse ought to be to enter into the interior dispositions of the adorable Victim and make them permanently her own. What happiness is in reserve for her if in very deed she descends into the unfathomable abyss of the annihilation of the divine Victim; if she meets, if she reaches her Beloved in those depths where He conceals Himself in order to show that the creature is nothing, the Creator all in all; for this is the actuating motive of His infinite self-abasement. The love of abjection, that is, true humility in union with Our Lord's humiliation as a sacrificial victim, constitutes the first condition of the divine union; it is the first, the only foundation on which is raised the supernatural structure, the hallowed temple where the adorable Spouse vouchsafes to abide. All our life we ought to labor at the task of laying that foundation more and more firmly in our souls. In proportion to the solidity that foundation gains will be the perfection of the superstructure resting on it.

The novice ought to say to himself: I must descend into those depths; in order to attain the desired end all that is within me must be abased. In saying all, I mean my intellect, my thoughts, my self-love, my judgment, my will, even my body, all, in short, that I am or have. And when I meet with humiliations, which under one form or another are sure to fall to my lot; humiliations which will help me to subdue myself, to abase myself; which will serve to accelerate my swift descent into a state of self-annihilation, a descent of which self-love continually seeks to slacken the speed, I will say: This is one of the most precious graces of my life.

The professed Religious will imitate Our Lord by rejoicing to be thought nothing of by his brethren. He

will delight to place himself in spirit at their feet, nay, under their feet, saying in his heart: *Exinanivit semetipsum*, My Lord, my love, my God, emptied Himself.

The monk or nun who holds an office, Superiors and heads of houses, ought to entertain similar sentiments. They should finish the text: *Exinanivit semetipsum, formam servi accipiens*, He emptied Himself, taking the form, the condition of a servant. For every Superior ought, unless he is quite ignorant of his duties, to be the servant of all his brethren.

What tongue can tell the divine blessings that will assuredly rest upon a religious house, all of whose inmates are so happy as to have attained this first degree of union with Jesus, the Lamb that was slain. What peace, what charity, what a spirit of recollection and silence will prevail in that house, where the souls of all are fixed on God in a habitual posture of prayer! The graces awarded to those who practise this devotion, the precious fruits which they will reap from their union with their divine Spouse in His self-annihilation are indeed beyond the power of words to express.

It must, however, be observed that Our Lord does not remain passive in His abasement. His first act was to present Himself as a victim before God, before the sovereign Majesty, the infinite Being of the Most High. But since the first stage in His sacrifice is the oblation, He offers up Himself at the same time that He makes Himself as nothing. He elevates Himself in a certain way by absolute abandonment of Himself to the will of God; for by resting in His nothingness He rests also in God. This disposition Our Lord expresses in the words: *Ecce venio*, Behold I come, to do Thy will, O God.

This second disposition of the Heart of Jesus must also be that of the soul of the Religious if she is the true spouse of Jesus crucified. All that she sees to be the will of God

will be her light, her joy, her life; the vows with their weighty obligations, the holy Rule with its manifold regulations and observances, the customs of the House with their minute details, every behest, every wish, every sign of her Superior. And not these alone, but also all the infinite variety of circumstances whereby God is graciously pleased to make His will known; spiritual trials and physical suffering whatever their source or their cause may be, vexations and contrarieties of every kind, etc. *Ecce venio,* is her cry: Behold I come, to do Thy will, O God; Thy will, all that Thou willest! That is my great ambition, my one desire; for that alone my soul hungers and thirsts.

This attitude of complete abandonment to God's good pleasure is indispensable for every Religious, and for the novice it is more especially befitting. The novitiate is the commencement of the religious life, and answers to the oblation which is the initial act of the sacrifice. Wherefore let the novice who is desirous of uniting himself to Our Lord in His oblation of Himself, consider that he is hidden in the seclusion of the novitiate, there to become as naught before God and before man, to live in abandonment to the good pleasure of the Most High.

What a happy time for him! Like Jesus, who did not anticipate by a single day, not even by a single hour, the moment appointed by His Father for Him to manifest Himself to the world, but remained tranquilly, gladly in His utter solitude, so the novice should rest peacefully, joyfully in the obscurity of his hidden life, without any desire to see the end of his term of probation. What he has to do is to place himself constantly at the disposal of the divine will, in union with Jesus, under the patronage of Mary. Again, I say, what a happy period! Once past, it will never come again, but of all his life in religion, however long it may be, no memories will be so dear to

him as those of the days spent in silence, in humility, in filial and happy abandonment of self.

Union with Our Lord in His oblation is rendered closer by uniting one's self to Him in the spirit of the mysteries immediately following the primary act of His life on earth. In His birth at Bethlehem, the divine Victim is seen by us for the first time poor and in destitution; the love of poverty is the lesson to be learned from it. In the mystery of the Presentation we behold His public oblation, and we endeavor to enter into the special dispositions of simplicity, of obedience, of humility, of perseverance in the path of sacrifice which this mystery teaches us. Then come the days of exile in Egypt and of His hidden life at Nazareth, and finally His baptism on the banks of the Jordan, His forty days' fast in the desert, and His public life; these and all the other circumstances of Our Lord's earthly existence will furnish us with a theme for loving meditation all the remainder of our days. The soul who is espoused to the Victim slain for our salvation will find in this her light, her sweetness, and the fortifying grace proper to her state of a victim, and which, by confirming her in this first stage of union with her divine Spouse, will prepare her to proceed to the second: union with Christ in His immolation of Himself.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE UNION OF THE SOUL OF THE RELIGIOUS WITH JESUS CHRIST IN HIS IMMOLATION OF HIMSELF.

Jesus is now about to become *a bloody Spouse* for the soul of the Religious. This expression is borrowed from the book of Exodus. Sephora, the wife of Moses, took, we are told, a very sharp stone and circumcised her son, in obedience to the divine command which Moses had omitted to fulfil. But the blood began to flow; the mother's heart was grieved at the sight, and she said to her husband: "A bloody spouse thou art to me" (Ex. iv. 25, 26). To account for the reproach implied in these words it must be remembered that Sephora, not being a Hebrew, was only bound to circumcise her child because of her Jewish husband. She seems to say: "But for thee I should not be forced to incur the pain of seeing the child's blood flow. A bloody spouse thou art to me."

Now biblical commentators observe that this expression is applicable to the Religious. The soul of the monk or cloistered nun may also say to Our Lord: *Sponsus sanguinum tu mihi es,* A bloody Spouse Thou art to me. We are sensitive by nature, and like Sephora, the Madianite, we have a horror of suffering; we shudder at the sight of blood. But we are united by our profession to Him of whom Moses was a type, and for His sake we ought to love suffering, however acute it may be. Jesus will be *a bloody Spouse* for us.

The mystery of Our Lord's Passion is a bottomless abyss. When we begin to meditate on the sorrow, the heaviness that overwhelmed Him in the Garden of Olives, we feel from the very outset that we are entering into depths that are unfathomable. The self-annihilation of His oblation may to a certain extent be termed an abyss, but the other is more somber, more awful. Then come the agony and sweat of blood. As we proceed, the shadows thicken around this mystery, the darkness that shrouds it becomes more and more impenetrable; and thus throughout the course of the dolorous Passion we pass on from abyss to abyss, until the stupendous ejaculation: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" strikes on our astonished ear, and we behold Jesus, our heart's true love, expiring upon the cross.

Now the immolation of Our Lord is being accomplished; the second part of the sacrifice of the adorable Victim is being enacted before our eyes. Jesus is both the priest and the burnt-offering of that sacrifice; the executioners are only the instruments employed in it.

The meaning of this tremendous mystery must be expressed in a sentence, for this is not the place to meditate upon it in detail. Jesus suffers, Jesus sheds His blood, Jesus dies; and it is for love of man that He suffers, sheds His blood, and dies.

The Religious who aims at union with Our Lord, and who is no less desirous to be united to Him in His self-immolation on Calvary, as in the consolations of the scene on Thabor, will love suffering; he will love it for two very powerful reasons. He will love it ardently, deeply, first out of love for Jesus, in order to be made like unto Him in suffering, to be crucified with Him. This resemblance is an absolute necessity for him. He will also love suffering for the sake of souls, the souls of unhappy sinners, since he knows that only by sacrifice, by the shedding

of blood, can their salvation be purchased, and he desires to suffer, to make atonement for them. But we must enlarge somewhat on these two points.

The soul of the Religious, the spouse of Jesus crucified, loves suffering because of the longing she feels to be made like to her divine Bridegroom. This same feeling is found in the order of nature; affection tends to produce resemblance of the closest kind to the object of our love. How much stronger is this impulse in the order of grace! St. Ignatius of Antioch exclaims: "My love is crucified!" *Amor meus cruci affixus est;* and urged by the stimulus of the charity this sight evoked within him, fearing lest the Romans might, in their affection for him, prevent him from gaining the martyr's palm awaiting him in Rome, he writes thus to them: "Forgive me, I beseech you, my dearly beloved, for what I say, but I know what is most advantageous for me. Now I begin to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Welcome the scorching fire, the shameful cross, the savage beasts; let my bones be broken, my members mutilated, every imaginable torture heaped on me, if only I may find in Jesus Christ my joy and rejoicing!"

Such heroic sentiments were not uncommon among the early Christians. In their epistles the apostles constantly seek to inspire their converts with them. St. Peter says: "Think not strange the burning heat which is to try you, as if some new thing happened unto you; but if you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice" (I. Pet. iv. 12, 13). "Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps" (I. Pet. ii. 21). St. Paul is never weary of reminding them of the same truth; and unable to contain his rapturous joy, he says of himself: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross. And I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." *Christo confixus sum cruci; vivo autem, jam non ego* (Gal. ii. 19). Who but

must admire such enthusiasm. "This," says St. Dionysius of Athens, a disciple of the great Apostle, "is an ecstatic cry. For love causes ecstasy; love does not permit the being whom it animates to belong any more to himself, it takes him out of himself, elevates him, makes him one with the object of his love. Now in this instance Christ crucified is the beloved object. St. Paul mounts upward toward the center of his being, and there he rests, suffering, slain, bound, nailed, fastened to the cross with Christ his Beloved. *Christo confixus sum cruci.*"

All the saints have felt these transports, all have longed for union with their Beloved, not indeed in the bliss of Thabor, but in the sufferings of Calvary. It is said that Our Lord appeared one day to St. Catharine of Sienna, and offering to her a crown of gold and a crown of thorns, told her to choose between them. His faithful and generous spouse did not hesitate; she chose the crown of thorns. "To suffer or to die," was the motto of the glorious St. Teresa. "To suffer and not to die," St. Magdalen of Pazzi exclaims. The words vary, but the love that inspires them is one and the same. It is union with their Beloved for which these souls ask, and since union is not possible except in suffering, it is for suffering that they ask.

The soul of the Religious must mount upward to this stage. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth [upon the cross, said the divine Spouse], will draw all things to Myself" (John xii. 32). Let us say to Him with love unfeigned: "Draw me" (Cant. i. 3).

It is true that suffering is abhorrent to our poor nature; how we shrink from it! When it comes upon us, by whatsoever name it is called, whether it tortures the body or the soul, how we endeavor to elude it! But if we bear it at first uncomplainingly, with our eyes fixed upon the cross, we shall gradually acquire an affection for it which nothing

can diminish, which every fresh trial we encounter in our life will render more fervent, more generous.

Suffering is the source of so much that is good and useful. It is the most powerful, most efficacious remedy for sin. It humbles the flesh, quells spiritual pride, it enables us to discharge the debts we have contracted in the past, it is the school of genuine virtue. "He that hath not been tried," the Holy Spirit declares, "what manner of things doth he know?" (Ecclus. xxxiv. 11). Suffering strengthens us, it makes us grow in stature; without it we should remain mere children in the Christian life. Until we are visited by it, until it forms an element in our existence here below, we can not feel sure of the possession of a single virtue. Our most admirable resolutions, our most fervent acts of devotion, the sentiments of faith, of piety, of charity, which sometimes kindle our heart, all these will lack vigor, their force will be but fictitious. The divine impress of the cross has not been stamped upon our supernatural dispositions and our works; and without that mark, without that divine seal, we dare not place much confidence in that which appears the best and highest, even when the flame of our devotion burns most brightly.

Our Lord knows this, and it is the reason why He invariably bestows suffering, as being the most precious of gifts, on His elect, His friends, His spouses. And if the soul accepts that gift lovingly, if she regards it as that which constitutes the happiness of this earthly existence, then the alliance she contracts with the divine Spouse is one of surpassing sanctity.

Happy the soul who thus detaches herself from flesh and blood, who only lives by the life of the spirit. Every Religious who strives with fervor and generosity to attain the end of his vocation is one of those chosen souls. All that tortures, victimizes, crucifies nature; infirmities,

sickness, trials arising from Community life, from the exact observance of the vows and the Rule, all this he considers to be of inestimable value, a prize to be preferred to all the good things earth can offer taken altogether. What do I say? He values them more than all that constitutes the happiness of heaven. Suffering, when borne in union with Jesus Christ and out of love for Him, possesses a charm that the felicity enjoyed by the blessed in the eternal country in a certain sense can scarcely exceed. A great many saints say the same. Listen to St. Bernard: "I venture to assert," he says, "that the life of the angels, perfectly happy although it be, would be wanting in one element of beatitude which I possess, if they could not enjoy what makes my happiness. But they do share in it by means of that charity which makes every joy common to all. And that happiness, the happiness of suffering, is one which the denizens of heaven can only know through the dwellers on earth."

Such is the value which the saints attach to suffering, such is the joy they feel when they experience its powerful, its painful grasp. This perfect degree of charity is not of course to be reached all at once; the initial steps on the sorrowful way are difficult; we may perhaps even think it impossible without a miracle to carry our cross to Calvary. Yet little by little the fidelity wherewith we accepted the grace of lesser crosses will merit for us that of bearing greater ones; and before long, being established and strengthened in charity by union with the divine Spouse, we shall be able to say with St. Paul: "I am filled with comfort; I exceedingly abound with joy. We suffered all tribulation, combats without, fears within" (II. Cor. vii. 4, 5).

Thus the desire for perfect union with Jesus and of acquiring resemblance with Him in His condition of a victim that was slain, makes us love suffering; but this

very desire leads us to give a definite aim to our trials and sufferings; this aim is the conversion of sinners and to make reparation for the insults they offer to almighty God. Jesus suffered for sinners; He was a victim of atonement for them before His Father; the soul of the Religious desires to suffer, she will take pleasure in suffering and will be a victim for the same intention, in union with her Spouse.

She must not allow this prospect to alarm her. The grace of her vocation requires her to attain that end and will lead and guide her to it. The soul of every Religious is a mediatrix; the name of Religious implies as much. It would be a strange mockery were she to bear this title without performing the duties appertaining to it. Christ crucified shows us what those duties are: upon the cross He prays, He suffers. Supplication and suffering, these are the two conditions essential to meditation. Supplication solicits pardon, suffering obtains it. The soul of the Religious acts as a mediatrix when she prays; but in order that her ministry of reconciliation should lack nothing, she must suffer as well. Space forbids us to quote the teaching, the example of the saints which bear striking witness to this truth. Suffice it to say that from the Fathers of the desert down to the Communities of our own day, the religious Houses are tenanted by fervent souls who take no other view of their glorious vocation.

It must not be imagined that we are now proposing to souls who are consecrated to God an extraordinary way wherein to walk. On the contrary, it is their rightful way. Only let there be no mistake; the Community life, the performance of the most ordinary duties of the religious life, the faithful observance of the vows, furnish all that is necessary for the attainment of the end set before them. It is not to exterior works that God looks, it is the interior intention which gives them their value in His thrice holy sight. He was pleased to ordain that man

should be redeemed by the blood that was shed upon the cross; yet the simplest action of Our Lord's life at Nazareth, His work, His toil, would have been amply sufficient to save not one world only, but a thousand worlds. In the same manner all the daily trials and sacrifices and sufferings of which we spoke just now, some of which are incidental to our state as exiles, while others are caused by the yoke of the Rule, these, each and all, when united to Jesus Christ, to His Passion, to the shedding of His blood, to the merits of His death, are the principal means whereby we are enabled to act our part of mediator for the salvation of the world with good effect.

Moreover, Jesus is free, He can dispose of His faithful spouses as He pleases. He has His chosen souls whose heroic example serves to encourage us when we are on the point of becoming tepid and faint-hearted. Some are called to walk in ways that are truly extraordinary; they are to be compassionated, for those ways are one among other sources of their greatest trials. Others are less prominent, being kept by the Spirit of God in salutary obscurity. The graces received vary not a little in degree, but those to whom they are given are one and all bound to practise the work of charity which St. Paul designates in the words: "Bear ye one another's burdens" (words which expositors interpret as referring to the zeal which should lead us to expiate in our own person the sins of our brethren), and thus come at last to say with the same Apostle: "I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh, for His body which is the Church" (Col. i. 24).

Words fail to express the high degree of sanctity which the soul of the monk or nun may reach if she is conscious that in her quality of bride she ought to enter into all the intentions of her Spouse, and share in all His states, and if she is careful to offer no resistance to the grace of union with Him which is insured to her by her vocation.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE UNION OF THE SOUL OF THE RELIGIOUS WITH JESUS CHRIST IN HIS STATE OF A GLORIFIED VICTIM.

The union of the spouse with her beloved is about to assume a closer, more intimate character; her love for Him to become purer. A sort of transformation will take place in the object of her affections. But the soul must still remain in her state of abasement and nothingness, for it is there and not elsewhere that her Lord loves to find her, just as, in the mystery of the Resurrection, the glory of God the Father sought out Jesus in the obscurity, the ignominy of the sepulcher.

It is in this mystery that Our Lord principally manifests Himself to us as a glorified victim, transformed, divine. The mystery of the Ascension is the continuation and consummation of this one. In the present chapter we shall meditate for a few moments on each of them; but in order not to repeat what has been said elsewhere,[1] we shall confine ourselves chiefly to showing in what the union of the soul with Our Lord in His character of glorified victim consists. Let us first recall a few elementary thoughts concerning the two last phases of Our Lord's sacrifice.

In the Incarnation we behold Jesus as a victim *offered* to God the Father; in His Passion, as a victim *slain*. In

[1] Cf. "De l'Union à N. S. Jesus Christ dans sa vie de victime," ch. xi, and xiii.

the mystery of the Resurrection He appears before our sight as a victim *transformed*. Let no one take exception at the use of this term. The ecclesiastical writers who have treated this subject employ no other. Listen to the words of Pope Benedict XIV.

After speaking of the oblation and immolation of the victim, he says: "In the sacrifices of the Old Law the victim was burnt on the altar of burnt-offering, in order that all that was material in it might be destroyed by fire, and thus the smoke might ascend to heaven as an odor of sweetness, as the Scriptures say. In the same manner, under the New Law, the sacrifice of the great Victim was consummated. This took place at Our Lord's Resurrection, for then, according to St. Paul's words, all that was mortal in Christ was swallowed up in life, and all that was corruptible in His body was consumed."

A real, veritable transformation was therefore effected in Our Lord on the day of His Resurrection. This transformation was only external, for it took place in His body alone. But since the different states through which His body passed correspond to certain interior dispositions which our divine Saviour vouchsafes to reveal in accord with each successive state, we here find Him disclosing two most admirable interior dispositions: the first of these is perfect detachment from all created things; the second is an ardent longing for absolute and immutable union with His Father in heaven.

The devout soul, the true spouse of Christ, will therefore follow Him into this mystery, and like Him, detach herself more than ever from all created things and aspire more exclusively to union with God. The spirit of the Resurrection is a spirit of purity and holiness. The soul who is inspired by it can no longer tolerate anything human and earthly in herself. In fact she says to every creature what Our Lord said to Mary Magdalen: "Do not touch

me" (John xx. 17). In her intercourse with her fellow-men, in her relationship to her family and friends, she repeats continually within herself: "Do not touch me." And this conduct does not proceed from arrogance or contempt of others; such sentiments would be the ruin, the destruction of the grace she has received. No, it is simply the tranquil, loving impulse of a soul for whom God alone has any attraction. Moreover, her charity toward mankind, her brethren, is the same as it always was; nay, it is even more tender, more self-sacrificing than ever; only that soul no longer feels drawn toward creatures, as creatures. The feelings that animate her are indeed altogether holy; her state of heart is one in which the most absolute supernatural liberty, the most perfect peace prevail; it is in some measure a foretaste of the bliss of heaven. In short, the spirit of her risen Lord dwells within her. She is entirely engrossed with her Saviour; He rules all her thoughts, her desires, her whole will; and consequently all her thoughts, her desires, her will, are no longer directed toward earth and the things of earth, but to God alone. Again I repeat, what a holy state! How pure, how wondrously perfect is the charity that pervades that soul; how potent is the divine love within her! It is an intense, ever-increasing love, which makes her continually long for the never-ending union with her Beloved. There is no more forcible desire than this, because it aims at the immediate possession of our final end. St. Augustine expresses this in the well-known words: "Thou madest us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart has no rest until it rests in Thee."

The spouse in the Canticle says: "I sought Him whom my soul loveth. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved that you tell Him that I languish with love" (Cant. iii. 1; v. 8). For sometimes it is languor she feels and sometimes fervor; faintness, not of love but

of the spirit and the flesh, which are too weak to bear such emotions; fervor, because in the moments of holy inebriation, when the thoughts, the affections are concentrated on the object of her love, a new life seems to burst forth within the soul, a life which would destroy the natural life did not He who bestows this grace regulate the whole being. St. Thomas expresses this when he says: "The heart opens, and it is as if it would do violence to the inward power that holds it back, and the vehemence of its desire is so excessive as to cause faintness." Now David, as if to prevent this faintness which seems to stay the upward flight of love, calls God his strength and his life at the very time when he describes the intensity of his love. "As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God. My soul hath thirsted after the strong, living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?" (Ps. xli. 2, 3.)

Let no one be surprised at this. The impressions made upon the heart by love are not all of equal force. But let us make one reflection of use to ourselves: Are we not bound to love Our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with our whole strength? Now, if this is the commandment on the fulfilment of which our salvation depends, shall we not attain to love in its purity if we exceed by ever so little the limit fixed by the commandment, and enter the royal realm of the counsels? The counsels represent charity in its intensest degree; now who ought to aim at attaining that degree if not the spouse of Jesus Christ? Let us not stop short at feelings; they must not be our rule; they are treacherous guides, and too often lead us astray; let us seriously consider what is proved by our actions. Is the love of creatures extinguished within us? Is self-love dead in our heart? Do we pray unceasingly, unwearyingly that the kingdom of God may be established within our soul? Do we long, with per-

sistent longing, for the plenitude of the divine life within us? Do we strive by continual watchfulness over our outward actions and our inward desires, to cause this spirit of purity, of detachment from creatures, the spirit of true holiness which is the spirit of the Resurrection, to abide in us? That is love, love endowed with all the characteristics ascribed to it by mystic writers; love that languishes, love that acts, love that aspires, love that eventuates in union. This perfection of charity is the charity which ought to kindle, to consume the heart of the spouse of Christ, of the soul espoused to Him, consecrated to Him as His victim on the solemn day of her profession; or else we shall be compelled to say it is not to be the portion of any one here below.

But no, it is not so. Jesus, who in the mystery of His immolation draws the soul to Himself, also unites her to Himself in His transformation. He will even go further, and will grant her to share in the graces peculiar to the mystery of His Ascension, and thus the union will be consummated to the utmost degree of perfection possible on earth; for, as we have already said, the final, the immutable union can only take place in heaven.

The mystery of the Ascension answers to the fourth part of the sacrificial ceremony, the communion. In this *admirable* mystery, as the Church terms it, Our Lord gives Himself as a holocaust of sweet savor, first to His Father and afterward to the Church. "In the Ascension," Benedict XIV. says, "the Victim is accepted by God the Father." The Father takes Him to His bosom, and just as in the burnt-offerings of former times, when the smoke of the victim consumed by fire rose up to heaven, it was said that the victim found acceptance with God, so in the Ascension, which mystery was the realization of what the smoke of the sacrifice symbolized, God the Father accepted fully and graciously the sacrifice of His Son, and in a certain

sense received Him into His heart. In like manner also in the ancient sacrifices the people communicated in the victim, after it had been cleansed by fire, so after Our Lord's Ascension the Church began to receive Him in the adorable Sacrament: "This took place"—we again quote Benedict XIV.—"on the Day of Pentecost, when the victim was given to the people, the victim being Jesus Christ," both by the gifts of the Holy Spirit which our divine Saviour bestowed on man (as St. Paul says: "Ascending on high . . . He gave gifts to men" (Eph. iv. 8)), and also by the reception of the Holy Eucharist, which then began to be enjoined on the faithful.

On the first part of this last act of the sacrifice, its acceptance by God, we need not dwell. The soul who has entered into the spirit of the Resurrection has the honor to be thus accepted; for as in this mystery Our Lord becomes in an unqualified manner one in whom the Father is well pleased, so the soul who really deserves to be called His spouse is also, although in a vastly inferior degree, an object of the divine complacency. But it is in this act on Our Lord's part of giving Himself wholly to mankind, in His character of a victim that was slain, by holy communion, that she is bound to imitate her Spouse and thus consummate her union with Him. Initiated by the mystery of the Resurrection into the perfection of charity toward God, we are invited by that of the Ascension to attain the perfection of charity toward our neighbor. For Christian, religious perfection culminates in this: to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with our whole strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. And because charity toward God is the source, the actuating principle of charity toward our neighbor, it is after having received the signal grace of fervent love toward God, that we feel ourselves urged to an ardent love for our neighbor. St. Gregory the Great

formulates this truth when he says: "There is no greater sacrifice in the Christian life than zeal for the salvation of souls." And St. Thomas, citing these words in his *Summa*, interprets them in a similar sense: "It is only," he says, "in the perfection of her charity toward her neighbor that the soul can carry to perfection her charity toward God."

The Church, the clergy, Religious, all classes of mankind, both just and sinners, the faithful departed, are meant here by our neighbor. As Our Lord gives Himself to each and all, so the soul who is His true spouse and victim gives herself to all, regarding herself as a debtor to all, as St. Paul says of himself (Rom. i. 14).

And just as Jesus gives all that He is to the Christian soul in this world, His body, His blood, His merits, His prayers; holding back nothing and promising her in the world to come the possession of Himself, so the soul of the Religious, His spouse, regards herself as the property of the Church and of all the members of Christ's mystical body. In the words of the great Apostle, she says: "I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls" (II. Cor. xii. 15). She seems to exist only for the sake of souls; her prayers, her penances, her acts of reparation are all appropriated to her brethren. And she, who had apparently found in God, in the loftiness, the sublimity of His love all that she could desire, shows that something is still lacking to her; she wants a spiritual progeny to which she may, so to speak, give birth for the love of her God. Till she can do this she will not be fully satisfied, completely happy: "Give me children, otherwise I shall die" (Gen. xxx. 1).

Thus all is consummated in charity, and nothing is wanting to the perfect union of the Bridegroom and the bride. In what will the bliss of heaven consist? In the final consummation of these nuptials. All else will be

transformed or will cease to exist, but charity toward God and toward our neighbor begins here below, constantly increases in perfection, and reaches its climax in heaven. This is the consummation in unity for which Our Lord prayed to His Father before the Last Supper: "That they may be one, as We also are One" (John xvii. 22).

This is unquestionably the end toward which all Christians are by their vocation bound to tend; but this consummation will possess a distinctive glory, a peculiar bliss for the Religious, since Scripture speaks of a special union in heaven between virgin souls and the Lamb. "For they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" (Apoc. xiv. 4). How happy then is the true spouse of Christ, the perfect victim of His love! How holy, how enviable is her vocation! Even in this exile, the union effected by divine grace is of so sublime a character that all eloquence is silenced, all admiration is inadequate. But when in our true country it receives its final consummation, who can tell what that joy and that glory will be! We must remember what St. Paul says: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (I. Cor. ii. 9).

CHAPTER XII.

THE MATERIAL ASSISTANCE OF MARY AFFORDS THE SWEETEST CONSOLATION TO THE RELIGIOUS IN THE WAY OF SACRIFICE.

This is indeed the sweetest, most delightful solace for the soul of those who walk in the way of sacrifice. *Vita, dulcedo!* But how can we speak aright of this mystery of love, of the joy, the peace, the celestial sweetness of this rapturous existence? For all the children of the Church, for the souls who are ransomed by the precious blood of Christ, Mary is a mother, a friend, a protector, a counselor, a kind and gracious queen, a watchful mediatrix whose heart overflows with love. He who should succeed in telling all that Mary is to us, poor exiles, would have accomplished the impossible. The tenderness of Mary's heart is beyond compare, her devotion to her children no tongue can tell. Mary is the masterpiece of love, the greatest work of the divine Heart of Him who is at the same time her God and her Son. We must not dwell longer on this subject; but for heaven's sake, never, never let our heart cease to contemplate, to extol, to love that perfect heart, that heart of maternal tenderness; to rest in that heart, to exist in that heart which is our life, the life whereby we live in Christ.

Such are the relations in which Mary, the purest of creatures, stands to all the children of the Church in a wondrous, ineffable manner. But we must acknowledge

and gladly assert that she is all that we have said in quite a special way for the Religious, for the spouse of her beloved Son, for the victim consecrated to the heart of her beloved Son, and the soul of each Religious has every right to these glorious titles, to be termed the spouse, the victim of the Heart of her Beloved. We will proceed to show at least very briefly (for were we to say all that could be said on this delightful theme it would fill a thousand volumes), to show, I say, how Mary is in reality the patroness, sometimes even the foundress of the religious Orders, and in what a touching manner she proves herself to be their mother, their queen, their directress, their counselor, their advocate, their friend, their comforter, their example, in short, all that is good and desirable in one. Let us glance at what history relates.

The Order of Mount Carmel is the most ancient of religious Orders. Some writers seem to question this fact, but to us it appears impossible to deny it the honor of priority, seeing that it was founded under the Old Dispensation. Now what gives Carmel its luster? It is Mary. *Regina decor Carmeli.* The Church, in her Offices, states this distinctly and definitely. The Order of Mount Carmel is undoubtedly the privileged, the favorite Order of Mary.

Next after this ancient and illustrious Order comes that of St. Benedict, the most celebrated of the Orders of the West. Mary was the promoter of that grand monastic institute. She herself, as one of St. Benedict's spiritual daughters has shown, prepared him for his great and glorious mission. This she declared on one occasion when she appeared to B. Alain de la Roche, and told him that the great achievements of St. Benedict, and the distinction he acquired as Father of the Monks of the West, were owing to his filial devotion to her.

Let us pass on to the Order of the Carthusians, justly

renowned throughout Christendom. The tradition attaching to the sanctuary of Our Lady of Casalibus sufficiently proves that from the very outset the Blessed Virgin watched over this venerable institute, protecting the saintly hermits with tender, anxious love.

A few years later we find the Cistercians, of whose reform St. Bernard was the able instrument. But to whom does the glory of this admirable Order belong? To Mary, to none other than Mary. This is attested not only by the oldest annals of the Order, but by a papal bull as well. Besides, to mention St. Bernard is to mention one of Mary's most devoted servants, and recall her maternal care for his several foundations.

Then there are St. Francis and St. Dominic. The cradle of each of the Orders founded by these two saints respectively bears a name which their spiritual offspring love to hear: Our Lady of the Portiuncula and Our Lady of Pouille.

The same century witnessed the birth of two other great Orders—the Servites, and the Order of Ransom. Several times Our Lady appeared, and made known her wish that both of them should be founded. Every one is acquainted with the history of the seven noblemen of Florence, and that of St. Peter Nolasco.

In the sixteenth century a new militia arose, animated by zeal and holy valor: the Society of Jesus, of whose powerful aid the Church stood in need. Before descending into the arena of battle with his intrepid soldiery, St. Ignatius had to hold his armed vigil, in accordance with the rules of Christian knighthood. It was in a sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady, at Montserrat, that he prepared himself to combat the enemies of God and of holy Church.

Since the Council of Trent the different Congregations that have been founded—and their name is legion—all without exception acknowledge Mary as their Queen, and

delight in paying homage to her under one title or another To enumerate them here would indeed be impossible; therefore, since they all have an equal share in our esteem, we will not single out any for special mention; but one thing may be said of all, there is not one which does not call on Mary with joy and gladness as its surest, sweetest hope.

They are indeed right in so doing. Gratitude alone would make it their first duty. All the blessings they enjoy, all the favors they have received come through the hands and from the heart of that bountiful Mother. It is to her love that each individual member owes his or her religious vocation. Yes, it is her loving kindness which he has to thank for having left the world and consecrated himself to God. And for this reason monastic institutions, if they would prosper and accomplish the work for which they were called into existence, must be careful to cherish the most sincere, heartfelt, loving devotion to Mary. He who labors without her assistance labors in vain. Our Lord Himself would not do the work for which He came upon earth, the work of man's redemption, without her cooperation. Wherefore in all that relates to the interior as well as the exterior life of monastic communities; whether it be the forming or perfecting of rules and constitutions, or reviving the pristine fervor and discipline; the direction of the novitiate, the admission of fresh subjects, professions, elections, new foundations; difficulties to be solved, seasons of trial to be gone through, persecutions on the part of the world to be sustained; in each and all of these, in everything affecting the interests of a religious community, Mary must invariably be the guiding star they look to, the hope in which they trust, the help that they implore. And if the members of any Congregation engage in active works of charity, such as orphanages, day or boarding schools, the care of the sick, the

aged, the infirm, let them incite those who are under their charge to love Our Lady, to honor and magnify her, and then they may rest assured, they may feel absolute certitude, that their generous Queen will repay their zeal a hundredfold by the spiritual blessings she will confer on them. The annals of every fervent Congregation bear testimony to this. For if she is so good to them before they have done anything to honor her, from their cradle, from their very birth, what will not be her kindness, her solicitude, her maternal affection for her children, her Religious, that is, if they correspond to her designs on their behalf, if they repay her by their fervor and gratitude!

As we can not enlarge on this point as we fain would, we must ask the reader to peruse, and if he has already done so, to peruse again some chapters in Fr. Poiré's work, "The Triple Crown of the Mother of God," or in "The Glories of Mary," by Mother de Blémur, on the goodness and bounty of the Queen of heaven. They will be found sweet as honey to the spiritual taste.

We have seen Mary to be the special protectress of religious Congregations. Let us now behold her as the admirable, the perfect example of the individual Religious. Here again we must restrict ourselves to a brief survey of this delightful theme.

The Blessed Virgin practised all the virtues of religion in an eminent degree. She was the perfect pattern of souls who are consecrated to God by solemn vows. Who does not know this? Who does not know the poverty, the chastity, the obedience of the Blessed Virgin; the humility, the modesty, the love of silence, the mortification, the fidelity, the charity that distinguished her? Every panegyric of our adorable Queen proclaims the glory her virtues won for her.[1] Heaven and earth extol her as being

[1] But after all these ascriptions of praise, and they are without

a perfect *mirror of justice* and of sanctity. Not only did Our Lady practise in person the virtues pertaining to the Religious, but, according to an ancient tradition, accredited by several authors of weight, it is said that after Our Lord's Ascension Mary presided over a community of virgins, and she herself took the vows of religion. The fortunate virgins over whom she ruled are said to have been a hundred and twenty in number. St. Martha, sister to Lazarus, who at a later date, the Roman Breviary tells us, founded a Congregation of pious women in Provence, was probably one of that number; and the same may be surmised of St. Mary Magdalen. What a happy community with the Blessed Virgin for their Superior! It may be said that with Him she rose and with Him also ascended into heaven, for subsequently to Our Lord's Ascension, she led on earth an angel's life. Mary the victim of God by her union to the adorable sacrifice of Jesus, Mary the victim of Jesus' Sacred Heart! What a glorious subject for our meditation, our contemplation, our praise, and fervent admiration! And for the Religious, what a sweet, delightful, most attractive object of imitation!

Wherefore let the life of the soul of the Religious be one of union with Mary. In her blessed company the way of crucifixion and death wherein the will of her divine Spouse

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number, neither human tongue nor angelic song has adequately described the high degree of perfection to which she rose by the practice of these virtues. We are always reduced to contenting ourselves with saying that all about her is ineffable, and by keeping silence attest most eloquently the admiration we feel for her.

What we have said in regard to our impotence to do justice to her religious virtues applies also to her spirit of self-surrender. Mary does not separate herself from Jesus in the path of sacrifice. After Jesus, she is the most perfect of victims. With Him she offers herself to the Father; with Him she immolates herself; the dispositions of His Sacred Heart are hers also.

invites her, calls her to walk, that way which is none other than the *via dolorosa* of Calvary, will seem easy to follow. The sacrificial blade, the glowing embers on the altar of burnt-offering will be less painful to her sensitive, her rebel nature which shrinks from suffering. Death, complete death to everything human will come, must inevitably come, but in the light of Mary's loving smile, in her sweet and adorable presence, death will lose half its terrors.

To all souls who are consecrated to God we say: Live in union, in close union with Mary. But doubtless those who have been professed for some years know already by happy experience what this union is, and what are the wondrous benefits derived from it by the faithful children of this dear Mother.

We will therefore address novices principally. They, being still weak and sensitive, ought to be most careful never to quit their Mother's side. We shall soon instruct them as to the exact nature of the conception which they ought to form of the novitiate; it is a solemn and austere, but yet a true one. We would therefore bid them hide themselves lovingly beneath the sheltering mantle, close to the heart of the Mother of fair love.

Here we will allow a novice-master to speak on this subject, than whom no one has a better right to be heard—Thomas à Kempis. Let us listen to him when he addresses the youthful Religious whom it was his duty to form for the life of perfection. His words will enable us to pass by an easy and pleasant transition to the second part of this book.

"When you are in trouble, if you are desirous of obtaining relief, go to the Mother of Jesus, go to Mary. If, in his malice, the enemy of mankind strives to deter you from singing the praises of Jesus and Mary, be all the more zealous in invoking Mary, saluting Mary, honoring

Mary. Yes, let it be your constant aim to magnify Mary, bow your head in her honor, commend yourself to her. Remain in your cell with Mary, observe the rule of silence with Mary, rejoice with Mary, mourn with Mary, work with Mary, watch with Mary, pray with Mary, walk with Mary, sit down to rest with Mary. Seek Jesus with Mary; with Mary carry the divine Infant in your arms; with Jesus and Mary fix your abode at Nazareth. Go up with Mary to Jerusalem, stand with Mary beneath the cross of Jesus. With Mary weep for Jesus; with Mary lay Him in the sepulcher; rise again with Jesus and Mary; ascend to heaven with Jesus and Mary; in a word, desire nothing else but to live and die in the company of Jesus and Mary."

Such is the manner in which the fervent director instructs his pious novices. He ends his exhortation by this devout ejaculation: "Happy the Religious who regards himself as a pilgrim in this world, and whose chief consolation consists in making his heart a dwelling-place for Jesus and Mary!"

Part III.

The Novitiate.

CHAPTER I.

THE EXACT CONCEPTION WHICH IS TO BE FORMED OF THE NOVITIATE. THE NOVICE IS A VICTIM OFFERED UP BEFORE GOD.

The religious life is a perpetual sacrifice. The soul who, obedient to the call of grace, leaves the world and presents herself at the door of the cloister, in asking for admission asks for a lifelong immolation of herself. Perhaps she scarcely knows, as the result of mature reflection, the magnitude of the favor she is soliciting; but, as a matter of fact, it is thither, to that glorious end, that the grace of her vocation is leading her; a most precious grace, of which the marvelous beauty will only be fully revealed to her in heaven.

Thus she enters the house of the Order she has chosen; she enters it as into a temple, there to be a perpetual, a whole burnt-offering.

But as in every sacrifice the immolation of the victim is preceded by its oblation, a special ceremony soon awaits her which will constitute her oblation in her character of a victim. The religious ceremony to which we refer is the

clothing, or taking the habit which marks her entrance into the novitiate. On that day she will become a victim offered to God, and the period which elapses before her profession is given to her for the purpose of making, with due fervor, acts befitting a victim presented to the Most High. The purport of those acts is to render her purification of herself more and more thorough, in order that on the day of her final consecration to God, the sacred day of her immolation, she may in very deed be worthy of Him in whose sight her holocaust will be consumed.

Such is the primary conception to be formed of the novitiate. The reader will see that it is in keeping with the view of the religious life which we take in these pages. But we shall not omit, for the consolation of the souls who are consecrated to God, to direct attention to other points of similitude between this initial period of their consecration and the ceremonial of the sacrifices of the Old Testament; those sacrifices which found their full accomplishment in Our Lord's sacrifice, and which also foreshadowed our sacrifice of ourselves made in union with that of the adorable Victim. Let us pause a moment and consider these analogies.

In the ancient sacrifices there were two kinds of preliminary rites before the actual oblation; the *sanctification* and the *acceptance* of the victim. The sanctification of the victim consisted in the fact of its being without spot or blemish. That was an external sanctification. The acceptance of the victim was the judgment passed upon it by the priests, pronouncing it to be fit for sacrifice.

Now these two preparations also form a part of religious consecration before the novitiate is entered. They commence when the secular who wishes to enter religion first takes steps to obtain admission into the novitiate, and are carried on principally during the time that he is a postulant. The first thing required is a sort of sancti-

fication which, like that of the victims of old, is partly exterior. It is the absence of any blot, vice, or defect either in the candidate himself, his character, his conduct, his reputation, his past life, or even in his family, which would be incompatible with the dignity of the religious state, or prejudicial to the respect in which it ought to be held.

After this sort of initial sanctification has been certified, the acceptance of the postulant follows. The Superiors pronounce a favorable judgment as to his fitness for community life, and the habit is given him; a ceremony which, as has already been said, may be termed his oblation in the character or a victim.

Thus his sacrifice commences, a sacrifice which ought to be perpetual. The word perpetual reminds us of a sacrifice of the Old Law, also so called. About this a few words must be said, they are not foreign to our subject. This is how God Himself prescribed and ordained the ritual of this sacrifice:

"These are the sacrifices which you shall offer: two lambs of a year old without blemish every day for the perpetual holocaust; one you shall offer in the morning, and the other in the evening; and the tenth part of an ephi of flour, which shall be tempered with the purest oil of the measure of the fourth part of a hin; and for a libation you shall offer of wine the fourth part of a hin. And you shall offer the other lamb in like manner in the evening according to all the rites of the morning sacrifice, . . . an oblation of most sweet odor to the Lord" (Numb. xxviii. 3, 5, 8).

Such are the words and commands of God, in the Book of Numbers. It would not be without interest to examine the interpretation given of them by biblical exegetes; but lest this should take up too much space, we will recall the substance of their comments. All agree in

saying that these two lambs typify Our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered Himself in the morning of His life, i.e., on the fortieth day after His birth, in the Temple at Jerusalem by the hands of His blessed Mother, and in the evening, that is, at the close of His earthly existence, on the altar of the cross as a sacrifice of sweetest savor.

The interpretation of this passage in its application to Our Lord is strictly correct; but can it with equal justice be applied to the soul who gives herself to God in the religious state? Undoubtedly it can, and the commentators of Holy Scripture assert this confidently. They declare that the lamb that was slain in the morning is an accurate type of the generous soul who in the springtide of her life consecrates herself to God, a living sacrifice, because, while life is yet young, nothing is wanting to make the oblation perfect; the eye sees further into the divine mysteries, the ear is more attentive to the voice of God, the feet are more prompt to execute His will. We quote the words of Hugh of St. Victor.

Such is the fervent novice, and such, we repeat, is the first idea he should form of the novitiate. He has presented his oblation, he is the antitype of the lamb of the Old Testament slain in the morning, and the sacrifice he now begins to offer to the Lord is a perpetual sacrifice, only ending with his life, or rather only finding its final consummation, its supreme perfection, in heaven.

But the incipient idea of the novitiate in the mind of the young novice would be incomplete were we not to dwell more upon what he has to do during this precious time, the most precious of all. For the experience of every Religious, equally with the teaching of the masters of the spiritual life, concurs in testifying to the truth of the saying: As is the novice, so is the professed monk. By this is meant that if a novice passes his noviceship fervently, there is every ground for hoping that the years

following upon his profession will also be characterized by genuine, unfailing fervor. If, on the other hand, he unhappily spends the time in a state of tepidity and half-heartedness, his whole subsequent life will be affected by it, and very often it will result in violations of the Rule and of the vows which will give scandal to the Community and seriously imperil the eternal salvation of him who is the cause of the scandal.

Alas! not unfrequently we see a novice fall away from his first fervor; but of those who are tepid one scarcely meets with one in a hundred who makes a sincere and thorough change after his profession, and becomes later on an exemplary Religious.

Thus we see that it is a great misfortune to make a bad noviceship; it is a loss which can seldom be retrieved.

And supposing that in some religious House the Superior should be so imprudent, so negligent, so sadly inexperienced as to make light of the important business of forming the novices, it may confidently be predicted that ruin—inevitable and complete—will overtake that House. The prosperity or the deterioration of a convent depends upon the manner in which the novices are trained. All men of experience and those who have written on this subject say the same. But since we are not writing for Superiors, but merely with the view of instructing novices, we will proceed to impart to them a correct idea of the dispositions in which they ought to begin their noviceship.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE FIRST DISPOSITION INDISPENSABLE TO THE POSTULANT AND TO THE NOVICE ON ENTERING THE NOVITIATE.

THE secular who has the happiness of being admitted into a religious House must, whatever be his age, his rank, his education, his virtues, be fully persuaded that there is much in him needing reformation and reconstruction. Certainly this opening assertion is a strong expression, and at first sight seems somewhat severe. But it is not so in reality; it is simply the result of observation and experience, and conveys a very useful lesson to men of good will who are entering on the way of perfection. It has often been said that whatever the virtues one may appear to have acquired in the world, it is impossible to judge of their worth until they are tested by the trials of the novitiate. Take some pious person who, before going into religion, was esteemed a saint in the place where she lived, but who, when once she has joined a Community, appears to be a mass of faults. The reason of this is plain. The world—or rather a certain class of persons in the world who only judge by what they see—are edified by a modest, recollected demeanor, a gentle manner, the practise of works of piety, of charity, of active zeal; and in all good faith, the world invests such persons, who certainly give edification, with an aureola of sanctity. But solid virtue does not consist in appearances. That which constitutes its real vitality and vigor is self-abnegation, the surrender of our opinion, our judgment, our will.

Now it is, above all, this simple, constant, humble, all-embracing abnegation of self that will be required of you in the novitiate, or at any rate it is this that you will be trained to practise, in season and out of season. This task is truly a mortal struggle. Nature enters upon her last agony, and must eventually give way and expire.

You were not accustomed to that sort of thing in the world. Alas for you, your experience was just the contrary. Unconsciously, no doubt, to yourself, yet most probably, you were by no means completely indifferent to the consideration shown you, the marks of esteem and respect of which you were the object, the gratifying speeches addressed to you; and self-love—all the time unknown to you, I am ready to acknowledge—fed and fattened upon all this. So you went into religion surrounded by the halo of a reputation for piety out of the common. Now all this, I repeat, prepares for you a task of no slight magnitude perhaps, a task of interior destruction and reconstruction.

Let the novice, if he is desirous of avoiding the terrible mistakes and disappointments of which the devil will not fail to take advantage for the purpose of discouraging and disheartening him, even perchance causing him to lose his vocation, let him, I say, be sure to tell himself, to impress on himself, whoever he may be, from the very outset, nay, even before he enters the cloister, that there are in himself a great many false ideas, erroneous views to be set right, human and wholly natural proclivities to be corrected, habits to be broken off or modified, faults of character to be amended; in fact a thorough conversion, a reform of the whole man to be undertaken, and successfully carried out, in the course of time, with the assistance of divine grace.

We say intentionally "in the course of time and with the assistance of divine grace," because of a truth this

work can only be accomplished by degrees, on account of its extreme difficulty, and no one will doubt that grace from on high is absolutely necessary for us. But if it please God, grace will be given us, and time, which is in itself a grace, and we shall succeed in the grand enterprise before us.

What is of paramount importance is to be thoroughly convinced of this initial truth: My noviceship must effect a complete, a radical change in me. It is a crucible into which I am to be cast, in order that my present shape may be destroyed, annihilated, and I may come out entirely transformed, made after the image of Jesus Christ, my one, my divine Model.

It must be acknowledged that regarded from this point of view the religious life appears austere, a path thickly set with crosses and sacrifices. Yet this point of view is the only true one. Listen to the words of Father Bourdaloue, one of the most skilled masters in the science of the saints. He says:

"The great advantage of the religious life is the self-abnegation it demands from the Christian, the mortification of the senses, the carrying of the cross; this is the aspect under which it must be regarded. To take any other view of it, is a departure from the truth, and consequently a delusion. I do not wish anything to be concealed from a young person who entertains the purpose of retiring into a religious House, who feels herself called by God to take this step. I would not have anything disguised by being depicted in bright but deceptive colors; let her see all that is entailed by her choice, set before her everything in its true light, and point out to her the thorns wherewith the way she is entering is strewn. For, as a matter of fact, what else is the religious life but the Gospel carried into practise, practised as perfectly as possible? And what is the Gospel itself if not a rule that enforces

self-renunciation, continual warfare against one's self, the death, the destruction of self?

"I shall be told that thoughts such as these will tend to discourage, to repel the aspirant; I reply that, on the contrary, they may, they ought to be the means of furnishing her with the motives most calculated to induce her to take the resolution and to strengthen her in that resolution. Why so? Because she thus learns to value the religious state for the very reasons that make it of infinite value as being a state of sanctification, a state of perfection, a state of salvation, a state wherein the soul may accumulate daily fresh merits for eternity, and lay up for herself new crowns in heaven."

These are weighty words. Let us beware of differing from the opinion they express. All the founders of Orders, without a single exception, formed their novices on these lines, and thus they were successful in raising the structure of their Institute on a firm and solid basis. The Fathers of the desert, in particular, those men of renown who so thoroughly understood the religious life, whose conception of it was so enlightened, and above all so practical, were admirable in this respect. We will not quote either their teaching or their examples now, as we intend to do so more amply in the course of this work. But we really believe that one must look back to them for a true understanding of the spirit of religion in its unalloyed purity. Since their day the religious life has been nothing more than a copy of their actions, of their life. The reader has already heard what the gentle St. Francis of Sales said to a postulant: "You are now wholly dead to the world, and the world is wholly dead to you. This is, however, only the first stage in the sacrificial process; two more remain—one is that of flaying the victim, the other is that of consuming it, reducing it to ashes."

The novice will, therefore, do well to present himself to

his Superiors and say with all sincerity and simplicity of soul: "Here I am; from this time forth I have neither will nor wish; I am like a lump of clay which you can mold as you please, which in your hands will lose its present shape and take a new form, whatever you may choose to give it. I am like a little child whom you can teach anything and everything you desire. Your counsels, your corrections, your approbation will constitute the one rule of my conduct. I wish to forget all my previous knowledge, to learn all over again, and I place no reliance on anything I do. Here I am, ready to do the will of God, and that alone, under your guidance; and I trust in the fatherly providence of Him who will give you the light necessary to make me go forward in the way He has marked out."

Such should be the language of the novice, such the faith that should animate him. He says: *Ecce venio!* Behold I come, to do Thy will, O God. So spoke the divine Victim, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the mystery of His oblation, so full of depth and meaning. We have already said how meet and right it is for the novice to bear in mind that mystery of self-effacement, the perfect, unqualified self-surrender of that oblation. And since the period of his novitiate, if we consider the spirit befitting it, answers to the spirit in which Our Lord made the oblation of Himself, the continual posture of the novice should be one of self-annihilation. He ought constantly to repeat: Behold I come, to do Thy will, O God; he ought constantly to look on himself as a victim offered to the divine Majesty, for the destruction in soul and body of all that is displeasing to the God of all sanctity and to cultivate the dispositions which will be most conducive to the glory of Him who is the beginning and the end, the center of his life.

CHAPTER III.

ON SELF-RENUNCIATION.

It may, perchance, strike the young novice that we are somewhat premature in dealing with a subject which in itself seems to imply a certain degree of perfection. In one sense, it is true, self-renunciation is peculiarly a characteristic of the perfect; it may almost be said that in one respect it actually is perfection. But this virtue, like every other, is only acquired by degrees, little by little, and it will be so with us. And since Our Lord said to all men, as St. Luke expressly states: *Dicebat autem ad omnes*, He said to all, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself" (Luke ix. 23), thus specifying renunciation and self-denial as the first condition of walking in His steps, it is only natural that we should treat of it in the commencement of the instructions we address to novices,[1] who have every right to be regarded as those happy disciples of Our Lord, who, having abandoned the world, walk *con amore* in the footsteps of their divine Master.

[1] Father Surin, writing to a Mistress of Novices, says: "They must be early accustomed to give up their own will, to die to their passions, to raise their hearts above creatures, and made to feel ashamed of all the instincts of nature. This renunciation will lead direct to charity, and render them obedient to the impulses of grace, for there is no shorter route whereby to arrive at the love of Our Lord than the mortification of all our natural propensities, our desires, our tastes, our pleasures."

Here there are three things that must be attentively considered and thoroughly apprehended in order to form a correct idea of the virtue of self-renunciation. First of all, it is essential to know what is understood by this *self*, this *ego*, which has to be renounced; in the second place to ascertain accurately what are the distinctive characteristics by which it makes its presence manifest within us; finally, to learn the way whereby to give it its death-blow, and that is by the practice of the virtue of self-denial.

Let the young novice, therefore, pay close attention to this subject; it is one of very great importance. It is utterly impossible to advance a single step in the spiritual life without the knowledge of what we are about to expound, without love for the means which we are about to point out for the acquisition of so indispensable a virtue. In fact, without self-renunciation what would be the meaning of that title of victim which we bear in virtue of our oblation? It would only be a great, a grievous mockery.

1. What is the *self* which we are bound to renounce? The word self signifies a certain life within us which is, to some extent, a part of ourselves, and which we ought to exterminate. Let us explain this.

In every man and woman there are three several lives: the natural life, the supernatural life, and the life of self. The natural life is the life of the senses, by which we come and go, we see the objects around us, etc.; it is also the life of the intellect, inasmuch as its faculties (such as the understanding, will, judgment, resolution, etc.) are employed in a wholly natural manner, apart from the supernatural succor of grace. It is called the natural life because it performs the acts proper to it by the natural means wherewith God has endowed us, i.e., the organs of sense and the faculties of the mind. We possess this life when we are born into the world.

It is needless to say that our natural life is not that which we are bound to destroy, for to do so would be to commit the grievous crime of suicide.

There is within us a second life as real and actual as the first, but the existence of which can not be verified by the testimony of the senses; it is the supernatural life, which we received at our baptism and which is also called sanctifying grace, or the life of Christ in our souls. Our Lord referred to this life when He said: "I am come that they might have life and may have it more abundantly" (John x. 10). St. Paul speaks of it frequently to the faithful in his epistles; we can not attempt to quote the numerous passages. Of himself he says: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20). This divine life, which St. Peter designates as "fellowship with God" is, therefore, really within us, if we have preserved our baptismal grace, or if, having lost it by mortal sin, we have recovered it by the Sacrament of Penance. And as life of every kind makes its existence known by inward movements and outward acts, so the life of grace, the life of Jesus Christ within us, manifests itself by inward desires, an attraction for matters of faith, the maxims of the Gospel, Christian virtues, and outward supernatural acts in keeping with those inward inclinations.

Happy the souls who live by this holy and divine life in unbroken continuity! All their actions are meritorious and worthy of Him who died that we might have life, this supernatural life of which we speak.

It would be absurd, nay, impious, to say that this most excellent life is the one which must be destroyed in us. We do destroy it if we have the misfortune to commit mortal sin, and this is so stupendous a misfortune that no physical affliction that could befall us on earth is to be compared to it.

Finally, there is within us a third life, an evil life, the

source and principle of bad inclinations and bad deeds. St. Paul alludes to this life when he congratulates the faithful on having extinguished it within them. "You are dead," he says—that is, dead to the life of sin—"and your life [the new life of grace] is hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3). And elsewhere he says: "For we that are dead to sin how shall we live any longer therein?" (Rom. vi. 2.) Again, he speaks of it under different designations; he calls it the "law of our members," because being utterly corrupt this life seems to act principally through the instrumentality of the flesh; he calls it the old man, because it exists within us previous to our baptism and has its germ in original sin. This is the reason why this baneful life is also spoken of as the life of Adam, as the supernatural life is termed the life of Jesus Christ.

All this is unquestionably true. Baptism has set us free from original sin, but it has not taken from us the tendency to evil which is one consequence of original sin, and this proneness to evil is precisely what reveals the existence within us of this third life which struggles against the life of grace, ever striving to subdue and annihilate it, whereas it is itself that must be destroyed and extirpated, if possible, with the help of divine grace.

But why is this evil life, which we are bound to destroy, this life of sin (if it may be so called on account of the works it produces), this fatal life, why is it called the life of *self?*

The reason is this. Because just as the life of grace which was imparted to us in baptism leads us to make God our center and final end, so that all our actions are directed to His good pleasure and His glory, in like manner the life of sin, the life of the old man, the life of Adam leads us to make ourselves our center and our end, and in all things to seek our own gratification and glory. But this will be more fully explained by what follows.

2. The general characteristics of the life of self which we ought to renounce.

These general characteristics are self-love, self-will, and attachment to one's own opinion. This means that the life of Adam within us makes its presence known by three propensities which it creates in us. It leads us to love ourselves, to desire nothing but what is pleasing to ourselves, and to cling obstinately to our own opinions and our own judgment.

The first destructive characteristic is self-love. Self-love induces us to conceive a high esteem of ourselves, to think all that we do is right, to desire the good opinion of others, and do all we can to avoid lessening that good opinion; to give way to sadness and dejection when we encounter the humiliations inevitable in this life, etc. It also leads us to seek our own gratification in everything: in our thoughts, in giving free play to our imaginations, our recollections; in our occupations, our likes and dislikes, our relation to others, etc. It is self, always self, on which our thoughts are centered, and which we seek to satisfy and gratify.

The second characteristic is self-will. This inspires us with an habitual abhorrence of restraint, an inherent aversion to all authority. If we love our Superiors, we love them for what they are in themselves, their pleasing qualities, their virtues; we do not love the authority with which they are invested. If we like some particular Rule or the practice of some mortification, we do so—perhaps unconsciously to ourselves—because they are self-chosen; those that are imposed upon us are far more difficult to accept; sometimes we find their yoke intolerable.

The third characteristic is attachment to one's own opinion. The intellect is the highest part of man, it may be said to be the citadel of self. It will stand out when all else surrenders. We submit our external actions to

the government of others; we give up our will, but the mind retains its independence. This is the point which must be attacked by fire and sword, for if this fortress is carried, the victory will be complete, and divine grace will reign in us and dominate all its foes. This destruction, this death, will be our triumph, and we shall be enabled to say with St. Paul: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. i. 21).

3. How to effect this complete death of the *ego* which is perfect self-abnegation.

It must be acknowledged that this is the work of a lifetime. Every one has heard what St. Francis of Sales said concerning self-love: "We ought to consider ourselves very fortunate if it dies a quarter of an hour before we do." Oh, what prolonged, what painful exertion is required to eventually compass this death! It is a long, an arduous task, and must, at the same time, be carried on without cessation or intermission. It is more easy than one would think to lose in a single moment all that has been gained in long months of earnest endeavor. Now, more than at any time, the Religious appears in the light of a victim continually dying, and in virtue of the generosity, the persistency of his self-immolation, enabled to say with St. Paul: "I die daily" (I. Cor. xv. 31).

It behooves the young novice after being offered to God on the day of his clothing, thenceforth to look upon sacrifices as his daily bread, to apply himself to this work of destruction. We have said that it is a lifelong work, but the novitiate is the most favorable time for commencing it and carrying it on vigorously. Well is it for the novices to be duly impressed with this truth! A thousand opportunities are presented to them, a thousand means of assistance are given them; besides, their position of inferiority, their good will, the grace of their vocation, more apparent and more efficacious than any—all this

answers well to the end in view, the death of self. Let them be faithful and remember that at any cost they must push forward this most important work. It will be too late to begin when the novitiate is at an end; unquestionably, fatally too late! Daily experience warrants us in asserting this, as well as the authority of all masters of the spiritual life.

Mortification is the usual means whereby we attain to the death of self. The word mortification is derived from the Latin *mors*, death, and in the sense in which we employ it, mortification is synonymous with renunciation. We prefer to make use of the latter word because it has a more limited meaning and expresses better the acts whereby to accomplish the destruction within us of self, our great enemy.

But the virtue of renunciation calls to her aid, in accomplishing this conquest, several other virtues, by means of which she attains the perfection peculiar to her, which answer to the general characteristics of this self which we pointed out, viz.: self-love, self-will, and attachment to one's own judgment. Thus humility is instrumental in destroying self-love, obedience effects the death of self-will, and simplicity that of attachment to our own judgment.

For this reason we will proceed to discuss these several virtues in the following chapters; but to these three virtues we must add some other very important ones which will render them complete, and will assist the valiant novice to arrive at a perfect practice of the grand virtue of self-renunciation.

CHAPTER IV.

ON HUMILITY.

We will now grapple resolutely with the means which assist us in dying to self, and first of all consider humility, which gives the death-blow to self-love. It is a grand subject. Thoroughly to understand and appreciate it is already a considerable step in the right direction, and affords a sort of warranty that the novice will go on till the goal is reached, that is, until, with the help of divine grace, he practises this virtue itself really and truly.

How much might not be said about humility, its own intrinsic excellence, the glory it gives to God, the innumerable benefits it confers on the soul! Were all that the saints have said on this sublime subject to be collected, it would form one of the most edifying of volumes. How admirably the Fathers of the Church write about it; what beautiful passages we meet with in the discourses that fell from the lips of the ancient hermits of the desert! And not to go back to times so remote, how much have modern writers done to make it known, loved, and practised. The most admirable book ever written by man, the "Imitation of Christ," speaks of no other virtue so frequently and so enthusiastically. In short, it is universally acknowledged to be the queen of virtues. One of the ancient anchorites pronounced it to be divine, and St. Francis of Sales told the nuns of the Visitation that

he desired that they should be perfect in humility rather than in any other virtue.

All religious Rules and Constitutions commend this virtue, and urge its cultivation in the strongest language; the novice need only read and meditate upon what is said about it for the instruction of his own Order. We will state, in order to assist him in understanding and meditating upon it, what is, properly speaking, the nature and essence of humility. Let him listen attentively, for therein lies the basis of the spiritual edifice, and if its foundations are not firm and solid, it is vain to attempt to raise that edifice later on; he will only be building upon the sand.

Humility is the virtue which puts us in our proper place in regard to God and to our fellow-creatures, and which at the same time makes us delight in this place as the one which is really ours, and the only one suitable for us. Then it awakens within us the desire that both God and our fellow-creatures, by their action in our regard, should help us to take that place and remain in it permanently.

Now that place is nothingness and abasement. Consequently what befits us, what is most just and right, is that the treatment we receive from God Himself and our fellow-creatures should tend continually to keep us in oblivion, or make us sensible of the contempt they feel for us.

This is a truth terrible to our pride, repugnant to the self-love inherent in our nature, to our craving for prominence and esteem, yet it is a fundamental, an essential truth, which we ought to keep ever before our eyes. We shall proceed to prove this beyond the possibility of doubt.

In ourselves, of ourselves we are nothing, and consequently it is just that God, by His dealings with us, and creatures by their manner of acting toward us, should leave us in oblivion.

What were we thirty, forty, fifty years ago? Not so much as a grain of sand, for we were nothing, absolutely nothing, and as we did not even exist, there could not be in us any strength, any principle of activity, by which we could become anything; for nothingness has not and can not have any virtue or vital energy.

This, then, is our origin, our true, unquestionable, essential origin, the necessary origin of every creature; nothingness, non-existence.

But it is equally incontestable that now we are something. Almighty God, the Author of all things, the eternal, sovereign Lord, has called us into being; we are His work, He has made us, our very self, our body, with its organs, our soul with its intellectual and moral faculties. And this thing that God has made is indeed something; something great and admirable, a work in which His power, His wisdom, His love shines forth strikingly.

That is true indeed, and we ought to be deeply grateful for it. Inasmuch as we are the work of God, His possession and property, His creation that He can dispose of at His will; we have a real and true existence, we are even great, since we have a grand destiny, for our existence is not for this world alone, it is to endure to all eternity.

Yet of ourselves, in ourselves, we are still mere nothing; we remain what we were. It is most true that if God did not continually preserve us in the being He has given to us, we should incontinently relapse into nothingness; we should, left to ourselves, return to the state whence we were taken, and which is essentially our own: nothingness, non-existence. Let us take an illustration. Supposing I hold a stone in my hand, hold it over a bottomless abyss. While I hold this stone it is surrounded by light and by air, but the moment I let it go, without any effort to cast it down, the stone through its own weight, by a

law of nature, drops into the abyss. Here we see what the creature is, what I am myself, with all my faculties, my powers, my health, my whole being; such is my condition of absolute dependence upon God. Should He withdraw that all-powerful hand which upholds me constantly over the abyss of my own nothingness, without any command on His part, merely by the withdrawal of His sustaining, preserving power, I should fall into nothingness, I should revert to my true condition, my proper place.

God grant that we may be profoundly impressed with this truth, which, if we understand and realize it aright, can not fail to exercise no slight influence upon our spiritual life. Unless we entertain a deep, clear, intelligent conviction of it, our supernatural life will possess no solidity. Let us see the obvious conclusion to be drawn from this.

The place therefore which appertains to us rightly and justly is oblivion, obliteration before God and man. It follows that when God, whose designs in regard to us are always true, wise, and merciful, consigns us to a kind of oblivion and reminds us of our own nothingness, we ought to adore His holy will, loving it as we love truth and justice; again, if our fellow-creatures neglect us, forsake us, and act as if they considered us to be useless, good-for-nothing, mere ciphers, we ought to say to ourselves with all sincerity that they are right, and are treating us as we deserve.

These are sound, practical truths. The pious novice will do well to feed on them spiritually. The fact that he is a creature is in itself enough to make him love effacement, and his character of a holocaust offered to God, bound upon the sacrificial altar, in His adorable presence, before His sovereign Majesty and glory, is a further confirmation of the justice of his state of obscurity and com-

plete surrender of self. God is all and he is nothing; and when Providence, by some special dispensation, casts him into oblivion, he only receives what is his due, and ought to acknowledge the justice and rectitude of the Most High, both because he is a creature and because he is a victim.

CHAPTER V.

CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT. ON THE LOVE OF HUMILIATION.

1. We will now see by what ways divine Providence sometimes causes us to be forgotten, and consigns us to a sort of oblivion.

This He does in various ways. Sometimes by interior darkness and aridity, by a mental impotency which no efforts on our part avail to shake off; or by exterior visitations, infirmities, sickness, and other humiliating conditions of physical weakness which incapacitate us for any kind of exertion, or even participating in the occupations of others.

Although we ought not to desire and seek for these states of impotency, at least in the normal course of our life, yet they are good for us, since they make us feel our nothingness before God, and we ought to submit to them gladly, as coming from His hand, fraught with love and justice.

But when it is the doing of our fellow-creatures that we are cast into obscurity and oblivion, are we bound to welcome this result of their action, if it is caused by indifference or heedlessness, or by deliberate intention, voluntarily with full purpose, in good faith, or with a spice of malice?

Certainly we should do so, and for the same reasons; our natural and legitimate place is nothingness, obscurity.

And if our fellow-creatures help to keep us in our right place, so much the better; we ought to be grateful to them for it.

It happens very simply. No one thinks of us, no one takes any notice of us, we never hear a word of approval or receive a sign of esteem or regard. We are set aside like a worthless tool that is no longer wanted, or that is good-for-nothing; it does not seem to occur to any one to give us so much as the most insignificant office in the Community. Under such circumstances let us be fully and sincerely convinced that all is for the best, and let us rejoice in this treatment as in the due order of things.

Meditate on these fundamental truths, study them deeply, both you who are young novices and you who are professed. They will reveal to you the true basis of the spiritual life, and will cast a vivid light upon the humility of the saints, above all on the humility of the Saint of saints, Jesus, our adorable Victim. Why does Our Lord always manifest Himself in such abasement and self-effacement from the mystery of His Incarnation until that of the institution of the Eucharist? Why does He always endeavor to be out of sight, to be as nothing? Now you understand why this is: because He took a human body and a human soul, consequently He ranked as a creature in the sight of His Father and of man. In a certain sense therefore He shared our nothingness. He knows, and none has ever or will ever be able to comprehend as He does the force of this truth: God is everything and man is nothing; this is why He seems to seek a lower and ever lower depth of effacement; He is, in fact, more completely hidden in the Holy Eucharist than in the crib or on the cross. O divine truth! True God of true God, and yet a sharer in our nothingness, show Thyself to us whose eyes are blinded by pride!

This same truth explains the humility of the Blessed

Virgin, our dear Mother, and of the saints. The more enlightened a soul is, the greater her humility.

But that soul does not wait for God or man to consign her to the obscurity she merits; she herself seeks nothing else, and adopts every means of remaining in the background, welcoming everything calculated to hide her from sight, and prevent her from gaining the esteem of others. She loves best what is simple and ordinary. Her language, her demeanor, her dress, all that she makes use of; the friendships she forms, her social relations, all testify to her love of obscurity and self-effacement.

We would willingly conclude this first point by citing the examples and maxims of the saints; but space forbids. If the novice can procure a work by St. John Climacus entitled "The Spiritual Ladder," we would advise him to read the twenty-fifth round, which contains most valuable instruction on the subject now under consideration. Let us proceed to the second point in the perfect practise of humility.

2. We are miserable sinners, hence it is only just that we should meet with contempt from God and man.

Merely as creatures we are nothing, and deserve nothing but oblivion, but we are sinners besides, and in the character of sinners we can in all truth and justice look for nothing but contempt.

Alas! what indeed is the unhappy sinner? A soul who has fallen to the depths of ignominy. Separating herself by mortal sin from the sovereign Good, from Him who is order, truth, and purity itself, she has fallen into an abyss of error, confusion, defilement. Never while on this earth can we form a true idea of the abject state into which she has fallen.

Consider that she has lost the glorious, sanctifying grace given her at her baptism, that she has lost the friendship of God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. the title

to heaven. What extreme poverty, what excessive indigence, what frightful destitution is hers! The poorest beggar on the face of the earth is a thousand times better off than she is. He has none of the perishable, transitory goods of this valley of tears, whereas she has voluntarily cast away the beauteous, the eternal riches of the heavenly country; she has lost God Himself. And at the same time she has incurred the penalty of eternal reprobation, of hell, with all its horrors, its shame, its degradation, its unutterable ignominy. She has deserved to be trodden under foot forever by Satan.

Then consider her base ingratitude; by her own act she has rendered void for her all the toil, the sufferings, the prayers, the Passion and death of Christ, rendered futile all His charity, all the tender love of His Heart.

This soul represents each one of us, if we have the misfortune to commit mortal sin. And if hitherto we have not been guilty of it, yet we are liable at any moment to fall into it; and our venial sins, numerous as they are, show us only too plainly what would be our lot, if the all-merciful hand of God did not uphold us, and preserve us from sinking into the frightful abyss that yawns beneath us, the abyss of our inherent corruption and prevarication.

Assuredly our fellow-creatures could not be blamed were they utterly to neglect us; but if they go so far as to take notice of us, what can we expect from them but aversion and contempt?

Behold Jesus, behold our meek and gentle Victim, who took upon Him our sins, and by doing so was reckoned among sinners; see what rebuffs, what dereliction on the part of His Father He endured, whom as St. Paul says: "that knew no sin; for us He hath made sin" (II. Cor. v. 21). See how He surrendered Himself into the hands of His enemies, His executioners, and endured at their

hands blows, outrages, mockery, the most humiliating treatment possible.

Look also at the saints, look at their love, one may almost say their impassioned love for humiliations of every kind. Were we to enter upon the recital of their heroic deeds we should never have done. Some even allowed themselves to be regarded as maniacs; others, being falsely accused, considered the charges brought against them as valuable gifts, which they took care not to lose by self-justification. The saints in all ages have displayed an insatiable craving for humiliations and contempt, as their biographies one and all testify.

Walk in their blessed footsteps then, O youthful novice, walk in them generously, cheerfully; be assured that great consolations await thee, consolations a thousand times more grateful to the heart than the gratification of self-love. Remember also that by the love of humiliation and contempt he lays the foundations of an indestructible edifice. Listen to the words of a venerable hermit of Mount Sinai. "Rejoice," he says, "when thou art humiliated; humility is a grand virtue whose foundations are so solid that nothing can avail to shake them. When the devil perceives that any one is endeavoring to practice this virtue, he seeks to make it appear mean and despicable, so that we may feel disgust at humiliations and no longer hold humility in high esteem. But he who bears humiliation and scorn well, will by this very abasement rise to a lofty degree of wisdom."

These grand and encouraging words will serve to prepare the novice for the subject which will form the theme of the next chapter and be the complement of the present one.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE TRIALS OF THE NOVITIATE.

The novitiate is a time of trial. This it must necessarily be for the welfare of the young novice who could not become an edifying monk, a true victim of the Most High, without the aid of trials. He must not forget that the task before him is to compass the death of the old man, to destroy the miserable life of nature with which we were fully impregnated when we left the world, and to succeed in living the life of grace; now in order to do this we must endure tribulation. An easy, pleasant novitiate would be a great misfortune. "Know, my dear daughters," says St. Francis of Sales, "unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. Our Lord's words are clear, they come from His own sacred lips. Consequently you who aspire to receive the habit, and you who hope shortly to be professed, ask yourselves over and over again if you have sufficient courage and determination to die to yourselves and only live to God. Weigh it well; there is plenty of time for mature deliberation before you exchange the white veil for the black; for I assure you, my dear daughters, and I do not wish to flatter you, let those who desire to live according to the dictates of nature remain in the world, while those who are resolved to live the life of grace will do well to go into Religion, which is nothing else than a school of renun-

ciation and self-mortification. This is why you see that it provides you with many means of mortification, interior as well as exterior."

Here we find the mild and indulgent St. Francis of Sales speaking like one of the ascetics of the desert. But we can quote a higher authority; the Holy Spirit Himself seems to acquaint the young novice with the necessity of a time of trial at the commencement of the spiritual life. Listen to this divine exhortation:

"Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation.

"Humble thy heart and endure; incline thy ear and receive the words of understanding; and make not haste in the time of clouds.

"Wait on God with patience: join thyself to God and endure, that thy life may be increased in the latter end.

"Take all that shall be brought upon thee; and in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience.

"For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation" (Ecclus. ii. 1–5).

These words of Holy Scripture do not leave us in ignorance of the trials that await us, but they also hold out a promise of divine consolations and benedictions, and these we shall reach by the sure road of mortification. Such is the interpretation given of this passage by the Fathers; and St. Francis of Sales, whom we willingly quote as frequently as possible, says: "Those who enter the cloister ought to seek in the religious life nothing but God and the mortification of their idiosyncrasies, their passions, their inclinations; for if they seek anything else they will never meet with the consolations they look for." After quoting these authorities, we proceed to open our subject.

What is meant by the trials of the novitiate are the interior and exterior sufferings, of greater or less number,

which try the patience of the novice, but the result of which, provided he bear them bravely, will be to fortify him and confirm him in his vocation.

Whence do these trials principally arise? First of all, they come from God, whose holy will ordains them, or who sanctions them by His all-wise permission. Secondly, they are caused by the demons, whose wiles and whose malice, whose power to torment us are only too well known. Old writers dwell much on the occult influence the devils are permitted to exercise over us. Thirdly, they are caused by our fellow-creatures; our Superiors, our brethren in religion; by externes, our relatives, society. Finally, they come from ourselves, our character, our temperament, our faults, etc.

A whole treatise on the trials that novices may encounter would be out of place here; we shall therefore confine ourselves to speaking of those which are most common, and which arise: 1. From our own corrupt nature; 2. From the Rule; 3. From the commands of our Superiors.

(1) The trials which arise from our own corrupt nature. The fount of evil within us is our fallen nature, the *ego*, our character, our temperament, the habits of our past life, the memories clinging to it, our imagination with its phantoms and its dreams.

This applies to each and all of us. Poor human nature! How little it takes to rob us of our peace of mind and raise a tempest within the heart. And if the agitation gains in violence and persistency, the temptation may have fatal consequences.

Let us now accompany the novice to the monastery. On entering he imagined that he would find there peace, joy of heart, in fact all the bliss of paradise. He does in fact find all that is needed to afford him, sooner or later, a foretaste of heaven; nor is it an uncommon thing for

the God of all mercy to encourage His favored child by granting him at the outset an earnest of future happiness. But ere long the period of trial comes. There is another novice with whom we have to live in closest proximity; he is beside us in the chapel, in the refectory, at recreation, and his idiosyncrasies, his character, his manners, are thoroughly antipathetic to us. We struggle against this feeling, we pray to overcome it, but in vain; the secret antipathy remains, like a gnawing worm, at the bottom of the heart. Does it arise from jealousy, or is our dislike well-founded? However this may be, it makes us miserable, and the spirit of discord and malice whispers constantly in our ear that our whole life will have, perhaps, to be passed in the company of that obnoxious person, and we shall never be freed from our present trials.

Or we are, perhaps, reproved for something. We fancy the rebuke was too severe, or even unjust. "They would not have said that to any one else.—I am always misunderstood.—They are prejudiced against me.—Some one has been telling tales, false reports about me." The imagination gets excited; the mind loses all its tranquillity, and the vocation, which a short time before seemed unquestionable, now appears to the distressed, despairing novice to be a foolish dream, an absurd delusion.

Another time news reaches us from the world we have left behind us; one of our parents has fallen sick. "How cruel it seems 'to turn one's back on them when they are in trouble.' Perhaps the illness was brought on by grief at parting with me. Is it not my first duty to see what I can do to succor and solace them? Several persons seriously warned me when, in my thoughtless ardor, I contemplated imposing this sacrifice on my family."

A visit to the parlor, especially at a time when the mind is enervated by sadness or want of recollection, may occasion similar mental suffering and temptations

of a still more dangerous nature, on account of the memories that may be awakened or the ideas that are suggested.

Another day physical discomforts assail us, sickness, infirmities. These indispositions are caused by the change of food, by the more sedentary or more laborious life of the monastery. The indisposition increases; the novice feels good for nothing, and says to himself: "When my Superiors perceive that I have not the health for manual labor or to bear the austerities of the Rule, they will send me away."

Thus fancy magnifies trifles, and the novice no longer feels the sweet serenity he experienced at the outset. His religious exercises seem intolerable, reading becomes a weariness, prayer a torture. The walls of the monastery, the atmosphere that pervades it, the very countenances of the Religious, everything seems a hindrance to his happiness, and the days drag by in a melancholy, miserable fashion, which may have fatal results if some drastic cure is not applied to the evil.

We have not enumerated a tenth part of the interior trials which may afflict the novice. Some souls, on the other hand, will not be called upon to experience a third part of those which we have already mentioned. One must compassionate those who suffer, and remind them of the words of Holy Scripture: "Because thou wast acceptable to God (as the grace of your vocation proves), it was necessary that temptation should prove thee" (Tobias xii. 13).

Trials, in fact, such as we have depicted are not a misfortune; on the contrary they are a boon and a great privilege. They make us feel very forcibly what we are in ourselves, what is the fount of misery within us, what would become of us were we left to ourselves, the terrible abyss into which we should plunge headlong. Accordingly trials serve to confirm us in the sentiment of our

vileness, and thus they become a powerful factor in acquiring humility. They lead us to pray, to pray with great fervor and insistency, because they make us sensible of our impotence for what is good, and what is worse, our fatal tendency toward evil. At the same time they increase the gratitude we feel toward God, for in the time of trial one sees more clearly that the grace of our vocation and of perseverance in our vocation are His free gift.

How beneficial for us, then, is the season of trial! But in order that the designs of God, who permits us to be afflicted, should be accomplished, it behooves us to bear ourselves bravely in the midst of temptation. We must have recourse to God in prayer, and not seek for human consolations, which only enervate us. We must rise superior to ourselves, to our melancholy broodings, our useless dejection, because in ourselves we are but darkness, and the sufferings we complain of have their source in ourselves; we must rise up and lift up our hearts to God.

First of all we must make use of prayer; this is the most efficacious means. "Is any of you sad? Let him pray," says St. James (v. 13). But we must also go to God by faith. What is meant by this? That we must seek enlightenment and strength from those who stand in the place of God toward us: our Superior, our spiritual Father, our Master of novices; from these we must ask help as we would ask it from God Himself.

We are inclined to think that this second means (the manifestation of one's heart in the spirit of faith) is, in the order of Providence, more effectual than the first, because it requires a greater exercise of virtue.

All the saints have attached the highest importance to this admirable practice. The lives of the Fathers of the desert are full of excellent maxims and instructive examples on this point. We will not enlarge upon it, because it is ably handled by Rodriguez, whose treatise on Christian

perfection is in every religious House. We would only remind the novice that fidelity in opening his conscience to the spiritual Father, especially in seasons of temptation and trial, is a reassuring mark of predestination.

Let him remember this, especially should he encounter the trials of which we are now about to speak, as he may feel more repugnance and difficulty in doing so.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE TRIALS WHICH COME DIRECTLY FROM OUR SUPERIORS.

In the Book of Ecclesiasticus we read these beautiful words: "Wisdom . . . walketh with him in temptation, and at the first she chooseth him. She will bring upon him fear and dread and trial, and she will scourge him with the affliction of her discipline, till she try him by her laws, and trust his soul.

"Then she will strengthen him, and make a straight way to him, and give him joy" (Ecclus. iv. 18–20).

These words apparently served to inspire the founders of Orders in drawing up their Rule, and in their treatment of those who applied to them for admission into their Community. In fact, Cornelius à Lapide, when commentating on the first of the above verses, mentions what was customary in the monasteries of the East to test the vocation of the novices and confirm them in the pursuit of virtue.

What we are about to relate may seem somewhat strange to those who are not acquainted with the traditions of the religious life from its first institution. Judging of the life of perfection only as they see it now, with the relaxations and mitigations which have crept in in these degenerate days, they are apt to imagine that it would be an exaggeration to recur to primitive observances and revive usages which would be impracticable at the present time. Nevertheless the ancient monks were not without

wisdom. St. Pachomius, in particular, received his Rule, of which we are about to speak, from the hand of an angel. The Gospels, the evangelical counsels are unchanged; our tendency to pride and sensuality are the same as ever. In order to justify the manner in which the austerities of the ancient monks, the energetic measures they took to destroy nature in the youthful novice, are now sometimes forgotten, it would be necessary to prove that, thanks to the progress of civilization and culture, our nature is not what it was; it is cast in a better mould, more obedient to the voice of God; that the practice of virtue presents less difficulty to us; that we are able to climb the heights of perfection with greater speed and facility.

Those Communities are to be congratulated which, on the contrary, have been so well advised as to go back to antiquity, and draw from the fountain-head of the maxims and examples of the ancient Fathers, the spirit of force, of prudence, of truth, wherewith those holy and heroic men were animated, and which alone give true solidity to an institution. Happy the novice also who delights in reading of what his predecessors achieved, whose one desire is to possess their spirit of renunciation and to follow in their steps.

We have already mentioned St. Pachomius. This great saint, who was born toward the close of the third century, has always been regarded as the Founder of the Orders of cœnobites,[1] and his Rule was considered so admirable that it may safely be said to have served as the pattern and basis of all subsequent ones, both in the East and in the West. This is what we learn of the conduct pursued in regard to the novices, either from the text of his own

[1] Cœnobites are Religious who lived in Communities, in contradistinction to the anchorites, who lived alone in the desert, like St. Paul, the first hermit.

Rule, or from the writings of Cassian, who visited the monasteries Pachomius founded, in order to acquaint himself with the observances in force amongst them.

Although the monks of the Order of Tabenna (which Pachomius founded) were very numerous, it must not be supposed that they were admitted indiscriminately. When any one presented himself at the gate of the monastery, soliciting the favor of being received as a monk, he was not let in at once, but (as was said on a previous page) he was left outside for about ten days, to make sure that he was in earnest. During this period he was obliged to prostrate himself at the feet of the Brothers as they went to and fro; and they were instructed to repulse him with contempt and harsh words, to ascertain whether his desire was sincere, and whether he would be humble, and patient, and steadfast in the time of trial.

In early times the motive that induced the postulant to go into religion was carefully examined into. He was asked, conformably to a clause in the Rule, if he was thoroughly resolved to leave his family, his property, and everything appertaining to the world. He was next instructed in the different obligations of the religious life; and it was the office of the porters to give him these preliminary instructions. Finally he was given the habit and became a novice. But Cassian says that did not mean that he was immediately admitted to the society of the Brethren; for a whole year he was subject to the authority of one of the porters in order that he might practise humility and patience in serving guests and strangers under his direction.

It is to be observed, besides, in the life of St. Pachomius, that what he enjoined most emphatically on the novices was the renunciation of their own will, their own ideas, their own judgment; and that, in order to school them in the practice of blind obedience, he wished their Superiors

to thwart their desires and inclinations in every possible way, and sometimes to command them to do what was apparently quite unreasonable, but which would be useful to them as a means of acquiring evangelical wisdom.

One might say that the principal anxiety of these servants of God was to destroy the life of nature in their youthful subjects. It was also the great object of the fervent novices under their direction, as may be gathered from what the most ancient historians record. St. Athanasius, who was a contemporary of St. Pachomius, says that the hermits set their wits to work to find a Superior of a rugged, cross-grained disposition, who would deal harshly with them, and the more severe those Superiors were, the more prompt was the obedience shown to them.

What occurred when St. Arsenius went into the desert affords an admirable insight into the spirit of the ancient monks in regard to the formation of novices. It is well known that Arsenius occupied a high position in the world, the Emperor Theodosius the Great having entrusted him with the education of the two princes, Arcadius and Honorius, the future emperors of Constantinople and of Rome. The distinction and authority Arsenius enjoyed at the imperial court led to his being called the father of emperors. At length, touched by grace, he resolved to quit the court with all its splendor, and withdraw to the desert to adopt the austere life of an anchorite. When he appeared amongst them the monks were sorely embarrassed as to the choice of a hermit on whom to lay the task of forming him to the practice of monastic virtues. It was, in fact, by no means easy to find a master for him who had stood in that relation to the sons of the masters of the world. They consulted together, and their choice fell on the venerable John the Dwarf.

John was highly esteemed amongst the hermits on account of the sanctity of his life. He had been trained in

the virtues proper to the Religious by an old man who had spared no pains to eradicate within him every fiber of self-love; and the saint, whilst still young, had to experience severe trials in the novitiate. In a future chapter we shall relate some of the expedients devised by the austere but holy old man to break the will of his disciple and destroy all human judgment. Since that time John the Dwarf's reputation for sanctity had been continually on the increase.

The elder hermits, therefore, taking Arsenius with them, repaired to the cell of the illustrious hermit, and presented the new arrival to him. They then told him privately what Arsenius had been in the world, the position he held at the emperor's court, his talents, the fervor with which he begged to be admitted amongst the Brethren, and the hopes they all had formed of him. John the Dwarf did not seem to attach much importance either to the coming of Arsenius, or to the eulogistic account given of him. The time came for the midday meal; the table was laid as usual, he asked the hermits to take their places at it, but said nothing to Arsenius, whom he left standing. The repast began; John offered nothing to his new guest until nearly the end, when, taking a piece of bread from the table, with a gesture as if he were calling to a dog, he threw it onto the floor of the cell, coldly telling Arsenius that he could eat it if he were hungry. Humility triumphed; Arsenius crawled on all fours, as if he were one of the lower animals, to the place where the bread lay, and, taking it up, ate it.

At the sight of such heroic virtue John the Dwarf was truly rejoiced: "Go," he said to the hermits, "go, my Brothers, in all confidence, and the blessing of God be with you. Pray for us. I can assure you that this man will make an excellent Religious."

Those were men of no ordinary stamp. We freely

acknowledge that it would not be prudent now to treat novices in that fashion. No; here we must recall what St. Francis of Sales said: "Such conduct is to be admired, not imitated." Yet if the mode of action is extraordinary, the spirit whence it proceeded is holy; and we must not imagine that it is out of date, unsuited for the present time. It made the great men of the early centuries, and it will make great men in all ages.

Moreover, these traditions of ancient discipline have been preserved and handed down to us by the monastic institutions of subsequent times, and in fervent Communities they exist and energize now as they did then. One may catch the echo of these primitive traditions in the words of St. Jane Frances Chantal, addressed to her Daughters of the Visitation, though one would not imagine the spirit of that Order to be the same in regard to the formation of novices. Speaking of the Mistress of Novices, she says: "The novitiate is the right time to train the novices in religious perfection. The Mistress ought to put them to trial before all the Community; to ground them well in solid virtue, to render them supple as a glove, to strip them of everything and detach them from everything, omitting no opportunity of thwarting their inclinations, their will, their judgment. These and other excellent mortifications she should make them practise for two years, and all in the spirit of charity."

Here is a point which must by no means be overlooked: "All in the spirit of charity!" The Master or Mistress of Novices must bear this in mind, so as never to humiliate, to correct, to try his or her subjects except in a spirit of charity; out of love for God, for whom his object is to train children who will resemble their heavenly Father; out of love for Our Lord, whose future spouses these souls are, and whom he must render worthy of the divine alliance; out of love for the souls themselves, for the Holy Spirit

teaches us that charity ought to be the motive of all reproofs, of all chastisements inflicted on a son. "He that loveth his son, frequently chastiseth him" (Ecclus. xxx. 1). Yes, let us repeat the holy foundress' words: "All in the spirit of charity;" rebukes, the most severe trials, orders and counter-orders, the continual exercising of the young soul, in whom it is absolutely necessary to destroy the life of nature, the miserable *ego*, to give place to the reign of grace, which must hold sway therein. The training of Religious ought to have no other aim; and when our perverse and corrupt nature is thoroughly known, it is impossible to adopt any other means than that of humiliation in season and out of season, trials at every turn, and above all that which directly conduces to this end: the death of the old man and the life of the new man within us. "All in the spirit of charity."

Not only the Superior, but the novice also must bear in mind this excellent maxim. "A great thing is love," says the author of the Imitation, "a great good every way, which alone lighteneth all that is burdensome, and beareth equally all that is unequal. For it carrieth a burden without being burdened, and maketh all else that is bitter sweet and savory" (Im., B. iii, Ch. 5). Charity is the universal benediction which God has given us to render all things subservient to His good pleasure and to our greater good.

This love is the love of Christ crucified, the Victim of charity, for whose sake the generous soul is ready to bear everything. And nothing is more acceptable to Him than the oblation of our humiliations, and of all that relegates us to that state of annihilation before Him which is our true place and rightful condition, since we are victims together with Him. Thus the young novice, in this spirit of charity, will delight in all that is of a nature to annihilate him in his own eyes and in the sight of his Superiors.

One day he will be received coldly; his Superior seems to be pressed for time just when he has most to say, and would fain unburden his heart; it appears as if his confidences were received with indifference and listened to in a perfunctory manner.

Another time an order will be given him which is apparently diametrically opposed to the one given him the day before. Without the slightest regard to his inclinations, his tastes, his aptitudes, his qualifications, a task is assigned him which is opposed to each and all of these, while a thoroughly congenial employment is taken from him.

He was associated in his work, his occupations, with a fellow-novice whose good breeding, education, and piety rendered him the most delightful companion; he is set to work with another who is in every respect as antipathetic to him as any one could be. No more peace for him, no more spiritual sweetness, no more rivalry in the observance of the Rule and the practice of the virtues of the religious life.

Or perhaps he is not well; nobody seems to take the least notice of his indisposition. The ordinary rules of courtesy are not even observed in his regard.

One of his relatives has been to see him. No attention was shown to the visitor; in fact one of the lay-brothers was very rude to him. Now the poor novice, already sorely tried, saw or was told of this, and was much hurt by it. While the wound was still smarting, he went in all simplicity to tell the Master of Novices what had occurred, and was coldly told to remember the passage in the book of Deuteronomy which runs thus: "Who hath said to his father and to his mother: I do not know you; and to his brethren, I know you not; and their own children they have not known; these have kept Thy word and observed Thy covenant" (Deut. xxxiii. 9).

Unfortunate novice! This is what awaited you in the cloister! Perhaps you said to yourself, like the Religious whom St. Francis of Sales depicts in one of his Conferences: "I thought that it was enough, in order to be a good Religious, to work, to make meditations, to have visions and revelations, to delight in reading good books. Just fancy, I was so virtuous, at least so I thought, so humble and so mortified, every one admired me. Was it not being very humble to talk sweetly to my companions about holy things, to repeat at home the sermons I had heard, to be very gentle in my behavior to all the members of the household, especially when I met with no contradiction from them?"

To this the good saint answers: "No doubt, my dear daughters, that was very edifying when you were in the world, but the religious state demands of you works worthy of your vocation, that is to say, to die to self in everything, both in what is commendable and to your liking, as well as in what is reprehensible and useless."

Courage, then, and patience, O novice, that is what you need. At any cost you must die, die to the life of nature, die to your miserable self. The bad blood must be got rid of; the abscess must be lanced in order that the matter it contains may be expelled; the poison of self-love must be ejected. All this is indispensable. You did not think about it while you were in the world. In the novitiate your eyes were opened to the disease which was sapping your strength, paralyzing the operation of grace in your soul. Thankfully accept the beneficial influence which will be exercised on you. Do not dread the point of the lancet which will open the abscess; do not shrink from swallowing the drastic potion which purifies the blood. Under the appearance of death you will receive the life of Christ, and ere long, O favored child of God, you who sow in tears will reap in joy.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE RULING PASSION.

The ruling passion is an interior disposition which inclines the soul to what is wrong, and influences it in that direction more frequently and more forcibly than all the other passions.

In it the chief strength of the life of *self* is, so to speak, concentrated. That life manifests itself and acts by all the passions of the soul, but it seems to exert its greatest vigor, its most potent energy in the ruling passion. If this life be compared to a tree, the dominant passion may be said to be its thickest branch, the one in which the sap circulates most freely, which bears the greatest number of fruits—fruits of a deadly nature.

We must therefore direct our attention to this subject, which follows quite naturally on what has been said before. No progress is possible in the spiritual life without a resolute and unremitting struggle against this mortal enemy. Such is the unanimous opinion of all the masters of the Christian life, from the hermits of the desert down to the ascetical writers of modern times. What we now have to do is to expose the wiles and the malice of the dominant passion—to show how each one can discover what is his ruling passion—and how it is to be combated and overcome.

1. Consider the malice of the ruling passion.

What we have just said will have given some idea of this.

The ruling passion being the center, so to speak, of the human self, the *ego*, the seat of its greatest power, it is evident that, together with the world and the devil, it is a formidable opponent to the life of Christ within the soul. Let us look into this more closely.

There is no doubt that our dominant passion is the source of the greater number of the sins we commit, especially of our venial sins. It principally conduces to bring the soul into a state of tepidity and to keep it captive in that state. This done, the havoc it is capable of working is incalculable, if we remember that the essential characteristic of the dominant passion is to keep itself concealed. And as it is identical with our own self, and the greatest difficulty is to know one's self, nothing is more obvious and natural than that we should be deceived in regard to it; we know the countenances of others better than our own. Nay, more, not only does the ruling passion conceal itself, and refuse to be known as a vice, but it aspires to pass under the disguise of a virtue, and even goes so far as to lend our other vices the semblance of virtues. One individual thinks a great deal of himself; that shows greatness of soul. He readily takes scandal at the faults, real or imaginary, of his neighbor; that arises from zeal for God and for justice. Another is weak and a lover of ease; he is guided by a spirit of leniency and mildness; and so on. Father Faber speaks forcibly on this point: "Thus the dominant passion leads directly to final impenitence; this is what gives it its terrible character."

"This being so," he adds with much justice, "there are few subjects of greater moment to the man who is in earnest than that of the ruling passion; for of all the obstacles to the progress of the soul in the spiritual life, it is the most common, the most secret, and consequently the most dangerous. . . . We here find ourselves face to

face with one of the most important matters of our life; how are we to discover what is our ruling passion?"

This is an affair that concerns every Christian at every period of his life, but it can not be gainsaid that it is a yet more imperious duty for the young novice, since the object of the novitiate is to compass the death of the old man, and foster the life of the new man in those whom God has called to the religious state. Let us proceed to consider the second point.

2. How can one ascertain what is his ruling passion?

There are three means afforded us of acquiring this humiliating but most necessary knowledge. (1) Prayer; (2) Examination of conscience; (3) Direction. The constant and humble use of these means will infallibly enable us to distinguish amongst our other passions the principal enemy which we have to combat and to conquer.

(1) Prayer.—This is the general means of obtaining graces of every kind. We must not fail to make use of it in order to acquire the knowledge of ourselves, which is a very great grace. St. Augustine had recourse to it, and he frequently uttered this short prayer: "*Domine, noverim te, noverim me; novcrim te ut amem te; noverim me ut oderim me.* Make me to know Thee, O Lord, make me to know myself. Make me to know Thee that I may love Thee; make me to know myself that I may hate myself." Let us beseech the God of mercy to dispel the dense cloud of illusions which obscure our unhappy soul; let us entreat Him to tear from our eyes the bandage which prevents us from seeing the true light. This prayer is all the more necessary because it is a peculiar mark of the ruling passion to blind us, as we have said, to our spiritual state, even making us regard this detestable fault in the light of a virtue.

Alas! how easily men are blinded. The world is full of those who are thus deceived in regard to themselves. In

their souls more especially the dominant passion holds sovereign sway and works frightful havoc. These unhappy worldlings deserve our compassion and need our prayers. But the Religious must not be oblivious of the fact that the same evil root which causes the loss, the damnation of his fellow-men exists in himself, and that it is absolutely necessary for him, by means of fervent, constant, humble, heartfelt prayer, to obtain from the God of mercy the light which is needful certainly to discover and surely to dislodge the fatal foe.

(2) Examination of Conscience.—It would be difficult to exaggerate the benefits the soul derives from this salutary exercise. St. Gregory (Pope) declares that the habit of making this examination is a mark of predestination, just as neglecting to take account of the faults one commits is a mark of reprobation. Our Lord frequently urges upon His disciples the necessity of watching; and St. Paul enjoins on Timothy to "take heed to himself" (I. Tim. iv. 16). Finally all the masters of the spiritual life extol the examination of conscience so highly and recommend it so strongly, that too great importance can not be attached to it as a factor in the work of our salvation. But of all the beneficial results to be derived from it, the knowledge of our dominant passion is surely not the least.

To obtain this end it is requisite to examine one's conscience every day, and thus ascertain what are the faults into which one falls most frequently. If our ruling passion is the source of the greater number of our faults, there is no doubt this is the way to discover it.

But it is not enough for the examination to be regular; it must be made with serious and careful attention, that we may not only discern the true nature of our faults, but also—and this is still more important—the source whence they come. One must ascertain under what circumstances those faults were committed, on what unforeseen

occasions, amid what social relations, and whether we experienced pain or pleasure at the time.

This is tantamount to saying that the examen ought to be not only daily and thorough, but patient and persevering, on one particular point. The monthly retreat will be a help to the daily examination; it is to a certain extent a general examination of conscience, a recapitulation of the daily ones.

It is evidently no difficult matter, with so excellent a means at hand, to ascertain with tolerable certitude what is our ruling passion. Then direction comes in to unmask it finally and fully.

(3) DIRECTION.—This may be regarded as a divine oracle. The simple and upright soul will find in it the light she is seeking. Let her but open her heart to her Superior in a spirit of faith; let her tell humbly and frankly the result of her examens; let her answer as becomes a child the questions addressed to her, and await, with complete abnegation of her own judgment, the decision of her Superior; let her do this, and if by this means she does not arrive at knowledge of the truth, how will she ever find it? Our director stands to us in the place of God; he it is whose duty it is to make known to us what we should do and what we should avoid. Consequently, if we place no hindrance in the way of the merciful designs of our good God, either through negligence or (which God forbid) through wilful misrepresentation, we may rest assured that we shall attain the desired end.

Let us then suppose that the young novice is now fortunate enough to know what is his ruling passion. Perhaps it is one of the seven deadly sins in its undisguised ugliness: pride, avarice, luxury, envy, gluttony, anger, sloth. And although infected by this hideous vice, yet he is in the land of saints; he is surrounded by pure, simple, generous souls, who seem ignorant of evil. Or maybe his

dominant fault is one of those which, although in close touch, as it necessarily must be, with one of the capital sins, are of a less repulsive character than those; as, for instance, one of the following seven: vanity, jealousy, susceptibility, proneness to take scandal, sensuality, levity, indolence. These humiliating miseries form a dismal list, but they are inherent in our nature; and even if one does but enter into a few details concerning them, more often than not one feels how deep is the taint of these disgraceful faults, and we say within ourselves: "It is not one single passion that I have, I have them every one, and they all appear in turn to be the dominant one at one time or another, as occasion calls them into play."

This may be true in a certain sense; however, the experience of those who have the direction of souls leaves us in no doubt that there is one passion which reigns supreme in the realm of our rebel nature. And now, taking for granted that we know which is our principal enemy, we will proceed to see in what way it is to be combated.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE MANNER IN WHICH TO COMBAT AND TO CONQUER OUR RULING PASSION.

This is the most important point and also the most difficult task. But if we are so happy as to succeed in it, how glorious will be the results of our victory! In order successfully to combat our dominant passion the work must be carried on: 1. Supernaturally; 2. Resolutely; 3. Unremittingly.

1. Supernaturally. That is to say, we must employ spiritual weapons in attacking our dominant passion, not those with which nature and self-love would provide us. For were we to employ the latter, we should unconsciously be fighting, not against our adversary, but for him. As our ruling passion is a fault, it follows that it mars our intercourse with the people with whom we live; and even if they are so charitable as to overlook our vices, our bad habits, yet it must needs cost them an effort to do so. Now when once, with the help of our spiritual Father, we have arrived at the knowledge of this vice, this defect, this bad habit, we naturally conclude that we must often be displeasing to the other members of the Community, especially if our ruling passion is one which manifests itself externally, as susceptibility does, or indolence.

But if we are not on our guard, self-will comes into play; it is always ready to offer its services in the struggle on which we are entering with our ruling passion, and thus act the part of a traitor, instead of an ally, by turning all

the efforts we make to its own advantage, instead of furthering the glory of God and the triumph of grace. This is how it acts.

Our ruling passion is hateful to others, therefore it is a humiliation for ourselves. While we lived in the world it was scarcely noticeable; here, however, it is plain to every one. It must be got rid of as soon as possible. But if you set to work because this sense of humiliation is irksome to you; if you are anxious to appear less imperfect for the sake of the good opinion of your Superiors and your fellow-novices; or again, if your principal motive is to spare yourself the shame you feel at the consciousness of your own misery and imperfection; if you seek after perfection for its own sake, that is to say, for the sake of the serenity it gives the soul, the human satisfaction that you experience at having made so much progress—then be sure that you have lost a great deal of time, wasted all your time, perhaps, in vain efforts and anxieties.

Let us always mistrust the view we take of ourselves, unless our first and foremost thought is of God. It is quite possible that our desire for perfection may be prompted by human motives, and may be the wretched offspring of self-love. In fact, self-love has all its own way if, in the good we do and the victory we gain over ourselves, we are so foolish as to take account of creatures, and the esteem in which they hold us.

Cassian relates that the Abbé Macarius once made a very good answer to a hermit who complained that, now that he was in the desert, he could not wait until nine o'clock without taking food; whereas, when he lived in the monastery, he could fast with ease for a whole week. "The thing is this," he replied: "in the desert no one sees that you fast and feeds you with praise; while in the monastery the notice taken of you by the others kept you up, and gratified vainglory was as good as a meal to you."

Alas! this remark sounds strange, but it is only too just, and affords an instance of the pitiable vagaries of self-love.

The Conference whence the above quotation is taken, treats of the principal vices in general, and of the dominant passion in particular. It contains excellent advice, which coincides with what we have just been saying as to the supernatural means of combating our enemy:

"In the war which we have to wage with our vices, we must single out the one which is most to be dreaded, and turn our attention, our efforts to that one. All our daily mortifications, our sighs, our groans, our good works, our meditations must, like so many darts, be directed against that one foe; we must call continually upon God with tears and supplications in order to obtain victory and peace, for it is impossible to conquer a passion unless from the outset we are firmly persuaded that we can not gain the victory by our own strength but with the help of God."

Somewhat further on he adds that we must not take credit to ourselves on account of this victory, but refer all the glory of it to God alone. He specially emphasizes this counsel, thus teaching us that the most essential sentiments for success in conquering our malignant enemy are faith, the spirit of prayer, and unfeigned zeal for and love of the glory of God.

2. Our ruling passion must be combated resolutely. This means that: (1) We must attack it in front and go straight to the point by acts of a contrary nature to those which it inspires; and (2) We must endeavor as far as possible to foresee the occasions when it preeminently makes its power felt, in order to provide against surprise and nullify its influence.

(1) We must attack it openly and directly. Take an example: Suppose it is jealousy with which we have to deal. Jealousy is a gross fault, and a very humiliating

one. How reluctant people are to own to it! They do not mind being thought irascible, or sensual, or changeable, but jealousy is different. There is something mean in this passion which makes our pride revolt. Yet it is no chimera; on the contrary, it is the scourge of many a novitiate where no great fervor prevails. The way in which this or that Sister is treated by the Reverend Mother, by the Mistress of Novices, by the spiritual Father, the little attentions of which one sees or fancies her to be the object, her spiritual advancement, the superior modesty of her demeanor, the veriest trifle, in fact, which one would imagine least likely to excite this odious feeling, all, in short, serve to agitate, irritate, and annoy the mind that is given to jealousy. The other Sisters notice nothing particular, but the jealous eye sees everything, and the unhappy soul is rendered melancholy, and carries about with her the envenomed arrow which continually inflicts fresh wounds on her. This unfortunate individual is certainly much to be pitied; one can not help feeling sorry for her, and wishing to aid her with a few words of good advice.

This is how she must set about vanquishing her dominant fault. Let her often pray for the person who disturbs her peace of mind, pray for her tranquilly, simply, calmly; let her go to communion for her, beseeching Our Lord to make her grow in holiness and increase in the graces she has received, and thanking the divine Master for having made choice of so good a servant. This she must do above all if the virtues and fervor of the individual in question have provoked her jealousy.

If it is her superior talents, her better education, etc., then whenever the thought of her recurs to the mind, it will be well to place one's self *in spirit* at her feet, saying: "Grant me grace, O Lord, to understand how great an honor it is for me to be at the feet of this pious person,

when I have deserved to be trampled under foot by the devil." And this one must do at recreation, when one finds one's self in her presence, or joins in conversation with her. But it must be done with simplicity and serenity of heart, and one must be very careful not to let one's inward feelings appear outwardly.

If it is the notice her Superiors take of this person which awakens your jealousy, look up lovingly to Our Lord, and say to Him: "Let the work of sanctification, O Lord, be accomplished in that soul by whatever means Thou hast ordained; let all within and around her be holy. As for me, I would fain learn more and more that Thou art all in all, and that if Thy gifts are admirable, Thou, O my Jesus, art admirable above all, the supreme Good, the one only joy of my heart."

If these supernatural means are employed, it can not be long before victory crowns our efforts. One may be certain that grace will reign where nature has been dethroned and destroyed.

These particular counsels would be different were it a question of the subjugation of some other ruling passion; but we have indicated enough to the fervent soul: Let her attack her dominant passion openly and directly.[1]

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[1] There is one exception to this rule, as every one knows, and that is when the passion which is contrary to angelic purity is in question. Then victory consists in flight, the avoidance of all occasions whatsoever, humble, tranquil vigilance in banishing every imagination, every recollection suggestive of evil; creating a diversion when temptation makes its approach felt by the uneasiness which invariably accompanies it; mortification of the senses, custody of the eyes, humble, persevering prayer; frequent recourse to the Heart of Our Lord, to His holy and blessed Mother, to St. Joseph, to our guardian angel. Armed with these spiritual weapons one may indeed be subjected to the distressing humiliation of what St. Paul designates as *the buffets of Satan*, but one is never overcome by them.

(2) We must foresee as much as possible and carefully provide against the occasions when its power is felt most strongly. These circumstances vary very much, and according to the nature of the passion itself it makes its malign influence felt now here, now there, now in the company of others, now in the solitude of the cell, in the parlor, at recreation, in the refectory, in bed; we are never secure against it; our relations toward our Superiors, with externes, the letters we write, the matters of business discussed, the office entrusted to us, each and all of these afford occasions which, according to the nature of our ruling passion, may prove fatal to us. But we shall learn by experience; and when we find that this or that place, our intercourse with this or that person, even the employment which duty prescribes, furnishes the enemy with an occasion to lay snares for us and entangle us in his net, we shall be heedful and circumspect. Thus, supposing that the behavior, the language, the gestures of some one with whom I am brought into contact in the course of my daily avocations, irritate and annoy me and get on my nerves, let me say to myself: I will never address that person without invoking the gentleness of the Heart of Our Lord, the meekness of the heart of His blessed Mother; if necessary, I will fancy, all the time that I am in that person's company, that I kneel before him, to honor in him the great dignity conferred upon him as a mystic member of Jesus Christ and His chosen Spouse. And this I will do in spirit with such simplicity that my exterior conduct may appear quite natural, and no one shall suspect the force I put upon myself.

The Christian who is thus careful to anticipate the occasions when his dominant passion may cause him to fall, and who, in combating self, does not allow himself to be discouraged despite the assaults of his enemy, will soon gain the victory. Such is the counsel given and the

hope held out to the generous soul by P. Guillosé, an eminent master of the spiritual life. "Bear in mind," he says, "that although you form the most generous resolutions to overcome your dominant passion, it is morally impossible that you should not occasionally succumb to it; consequently determine never to lose heart, however numerous your relapses. Say to yourself: I am but human; however, I have a good will and abundant graces; as to the former, that depends upon myself, and the latter will not be withdrawn, so I venture to hope that in the course of time I may be triumphant; yet even if this passion were to make me fall several times a day, I will not be disheartened."

But if it be true that we ought never to allow ourselves to be discouraged, it is equally true that we ought to persevere and struggle continually and energetically. This will be our third point.

(3) We must combat our ruling passion unremittingly. Man's life on earth is a warfare. We shall never acquire any solid virtue if we lose sight of this fundamental truth. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence," our divine Master says, "and the violent bear it away." We must never cease to struggle, always and everywhere; to go on fighting if we have won a victory, more than one victory, as well as if we had sustained defeat once, twice, ten times over.

As a general maxim it may be laid down that very rarely is the dominant passion entirely subjugated, crushed out once and forever. In speaking of self-love, which manifests most strongly in the ruling passion, we quoted the saying of St. Francis of Sales: "We may consider ourselves fortunate if it dies a quarter of an hour before we do." But if, even in spite of constant exertions, it is seldom that a complete victory is achieved, what would it be if we voluntarily allowed ourselves to be vanquished,

and never sought to repair our defeat? We may repair it, and to some extent transform it into a victory, if we have the courage to chastise ourselves, and that severely.

The penance to be imposed must vary according to the gravity of the fault committed and the essential character of the ruling passion. In every case direction on this point is necessary, otherwise nature, and perhaps the very passion we are seeking to overcome, might turn the occasion to their own advantage and gain a fresh and sure victory in the penance which we have chosen ourselves, and not always discreetly. Thus if a hot-tempered person, after some act of impatience, should take a discipline and chastise herself almost angrily, without the spirit of confidence in God which ought to inspire all our self-imposed penances, that individual would fall a second time into the fault she thought to correct, and what is most to be deplored, her malady would be aggravated by the remedy adopted to remove it. The same might be said of one who, being given to vanity, should impose some public humiliation on herself. Since her penance would be self-chosen, it is greatly to be feared lest her vanity should find something whereon to feed in what was meant as a punishment. It appertains, I repeat, chiefly to the director to prescribe the remedy for the disease. Humility, submission, the spirit of faith wherewith we make our faults known and accept the punishment they deserve, all these are in themselves an act of reparation and a step onward in the work we have undertaken.

We will conclude with the wise advice Father Faber gives on this subject: "Be on your guard against the delusions into which the devil will endeavor to make you fall, by persuading you that this unremitting struggle to subjugate the ruling passion is only suited for saints, and belongs to the highest states of the spiritual life."

This is one of his favorite maxims, of which he makes use on almost every occasion. The wise man only needs to hear it to mistrust it. What is much more true is that the soul can not hope to attain any great height of spirituality as long as she has not succeeded in gaining an almost total victory over her dominant passion. This is an indispensable condition; we must fulfil that condition and do so without delay. No, indeed, neither visions, nor ecstasies, nor mortifications, not even miracles or the most striking light obtained in contemplation will avail to make us advance a single step in the way which leads to union with God, if we cease to wage war with holy pertinacity against our ruling passion.

CHAPTER X.

ON FAULTS OF CHARACTER.

After the ruling passion, our whole attention should be directed to our faults of character. We say *after*, but we do not wish to infer that we need not attempt to combat them until the dominant passion is thoroughly subdued, but because faults of character, regarded in general, are less dangerous to the soul than the enemy of which we spoke in the previous chapter. There are even some faults of character which are not directly the source of any sin, since they are natural imperfections, as, for instance, if the principal defect in a man's character is want of judgment; yet it is a fact which must not be overlooked that these natural imperfections may be so prejudicial to Community life that they may be considered as arguing the absence of a vocation to the religious state. It is very important to look at them from this point of view.

By a man's character is meant the tastes and inclinations natural to him, taken as a whole, which determine his manner of thought, his desires, actions, and course of conduct in the practical matters of life. This general disposition, or rather the union of all our natural tendencies, is not necessarily evil. Some characters are by nature good. But, whether good or evil, we all without exception possess these dispositions, tendencies, habits, which, taken as a whole, form our character. They are deeply rooted in our nature and depend as to what they are on

our temperament, our early training, and the care or want of care which we have shown in the practice of virtue from our childhood.

We do not intend to speak here of characters which are essentially good. There is only one thing to be said about them, and that is, they must be supernaturalized; i.e., those inclinations, that frame of mind, which are naturally good, must have a spring of action given them which is not merely the promptings, right and well regulated though they may be, of a happily-constituted nature, but the impulse of divine grace, with its supernatural motives and principles. The Master or Mistress of Novices can easily explain this to his or her subjects. We will turn our attention to faults of character; this is a more important and practical subject.

Faults of character are the frame of mind, the tendencies, the habits which are imperfect, faulty, and sometimes bad, by means of which our natural disposition reveals itself, makes itself apparent to those about us.

Some of these faults are of lesser importance and do not much impede our sanctification, nor are they an obstacle to our admission to Community life. Still they should be diligently combated as soon as they are pointed out to us; however, it may be said as a general rule it is not essential to a high degree of perfection to have completely conquered these faults.

Others there are which, if not eradicated during the period of the novitiate, are said by the Masters of the religious life to constitute a mark that the novice has no vocation and consequently must be excluded from religious profession.

These faults are twelve in number. We will describe them briefly, for it would be beside our purpose to enter upon them in a detailed manner; but we think it will be found that enough has been said about them.

1. The Want of Intelligence.—The want of common

sense or intelligence incapacitates a subject for Community life. It gives rise to an untold amount of miseries, especially if the Religious is promoted to some superior rank. It is safe to say, as a general rule, that it is better to have less virtue and more judgment, than to be distinguished for certain virtues and have very little judgment. With time and a good will virtue may be acquired; intelligence never can be acquired; grace itself is impotent to remove this defect, or almost entirely so. Consequently the founders of Orders and all who speak of the qualities requisite in the novice are relentless on this point. St. Teresa says: "We must not take postulants who are wanting in intelligence, because they will not be able to understand the good advice given them. For the most part those who are deficient in this way think they know better what is suited for them than do the wisest amongst us. This defect appears incurable to me, since it is rarely unaccompanied by a certain malignity. I can not see what good any one who is wanting in intelligence can be to the Community; but I can see very plainly that she may do a great deal of harm to it."

No one can speak more decidedly than this. Yet there are degrees in this unfortunate defect; and one can imagine that a lay-brother or sister, though not gifted with much sense, would not exercise any detrimental influence on the Community.[1]

2. LEVITY.—This fault of character forms a great obstacle to admission, and unless it be corrected, an insuperable obstacle to profession in a Community which attaches great importance to keeping up the true spirit of religion. Levity of character is inimical to reflection, to silence, to recollection, to perseverance in the practice of virtue. It

[1] Properly speaking, the want of intelligence or good sense is not so much a fault of character as a defect of the intellect.

is constantly changing. It is impossible to rely upon any resolution a person of this character may take, and if perchance this fault is to a great extent subdued and got under during the novitiate, the chances are that it will start up afresh as soon as the curb is removed by the apparent relaxation of discipline after profession. This is the sort of character which asks for endless dispenses, and wearies the Superior by a thousand vagaries of one kind or another. At one time their great wish is to return to a secular life, at another they dream of entering a more austere Order. It is impossible to overrate the importance of watching the progress such persons make during the novitiate in the practice of solid virtues. If it can not be asserted that they have amended in this respect, they must be dismissed without mercy. Wherefore let the novice who is infected by this malady set valiantly to work to cure it.

3. Duplicity.—It is easy to understand how utterly opposed this fault is to Community life, which is all openness, simplicity, frankness toward one's Superiors, and cordiality, sincere charity and kindness toward one's fellow-Religious. Mme. Louise of France, a nun in the Carmelite convent of St. Denis, who was most clear-sighted in regard to the qualities necessary to make a good Religious, was extremely severe on this point. She considered few faults, her biographer says, to be more diametrically at variance with the spirit of religion than proneness to concealment and duplicity. She regarded it as betokening utter unfitness for the cloister, because it is inherent in the character, and is more rarely corrected than other faults, even much grosser ones.

4. Melancholy and Gloom.—A sad and melancholy disposition not only renders its possessor unhappy, but also those who live with him. A Community, several of whose members were afflicted with this malady, would

find its days were numbered. How, as a matter of fact, could any one live in the continual companionship of persons who by their demeanor and behavior, by their very presence, cast a funereal gloom around them? Yet we must beware of misapprehension concerning the nature of this evil. It may simply be the effect of a passing trial, and thus not last any length of time. If so, one need not be alarmed; the affliction, the trial will pass away and the soul will recover its serenity. If the melancholy is not an integral part of the character, it will not be difficult to banish it; otherwise there is little to be hoped for. Neither St. Teresa nor St. Chantal would profess a subject who was habitually the prey of a sad and gloomy frame of mind.

It is the duty of the novice, therefore, to shake off this sadness, and since he gives himself to God in the character of a victim, let him see that, in accordance with St. Paul's admonition, his gift is that of a cheerful giver.

5. Restlessness and Disquietude.—The good and indulgent St. Francis of Sales tells us his opinion concerning this kind of character. On the nuns of the Visitation at Annecy consulting him about it, he answered thus: "You ask me, in the first place, how one ought to act supposing there was a novice who was very apt to be put out about trifles, who often seemed to be troubled in mind and disquieted, and who at such times displayed no love for her vocation, and who yet, when this mood had passed away, promised to do wonders. Unquestionably one who is so variable is not fit for the religious state. One does not know, you may urge, whether this changeableness proceeds from want of resolution to correct herself, or whether she really does not understand in what true virtue consists. At any rate, if after having made her thoroughly comprehend what she ought to do she does not do it, one must send her away."

Thus we see that St. Francis of Sales would not admit persons who are unduly agitated, whatever be the cause of their disquietude.

One does indeed understand that a restless mind, always more or less agitated about something or other, matters relating to the world or to himself (anxieties suggested by self-love, exaggerated concern for his personal interests, both bodily and mental, scruples natural and voluntary, the outcome of inflexibility of the will), one can understand, we say, that a character of this description is not only a torment to himself, but a torment to his Superiors and to all about him. Without radical amendment, he is ill-fitted for Community life; but one must be careful to observe whether this disquietude is inherent in the nature of the novice or the effect of some temptation. If it be the latter, there will be more chance of improvement.

6. Vanity and Self-sufficiency.—Here we have a veritable plague! We can not think without horror of these persons who, as St. Francis of Sales expresses it, "while in the world were overflowing with vanity, and who go into religion, not to humble themselves, but to take the reins of government." The saint adds that great caution is requisite in regard to such persons.

St. Teresa was of the same opinion. It is related of her that one day one of these ladies who think so much of themselves presented herself requesting to be admitted among the saint's daughters. The would-be postulant, however, must needs make certain stipulations, and first of all she stated that she was in the habit of constantly reading the Holy Scriptures, and cared for no other book; consequently she requested that she might not be required to give up her Bible. The keen-sighted Reformer of Carmel detected at a glance the overweaning vanity of the newcomer, and answered coldly: "That is quite enough,

Mademoiselle; you can present yourself at some other door; as for us, we do not want either your Bible or yourself."

7. Haughtiness.—This fault of character bears a certain relation to the preceding one; but it is unquestionably a lesser evil. Vanity and self-sufficiency are implanted in the soul and display themselves in speech and demeanor. Haughtiness, on the contrary, can only manifest itself in deportment and manner; but it is so opposed to religious modesty, it contrasts so strongly with the habit itself, the garment emblematic of humility and decorum given by the Church to the Religious; there is so much that is unbecoming in the general mien, the gait, the proud carriage, that it is necessary at any cost to lower this lofty bearing and apply a true standard to these airs of fictitious value. The generous soul who vigorously combats a fault of this kind, and succeeds in conquering it, may very probably attain a high degree of humility and modesty after her victory, whereas if, unhappily, no pains were taken to overcome it, it might be the cause of much harm to the Community. Besides, the Religious is a victim; imagine a victim who is proud and haughty! My God, what a contradiction in terms!

8. Irascibility and Vindictiveness.—A character may be passionate without being vindictive. We only couple the two words together because of a certain analogy between them. But it will be seen at once how opposed both of them are to the true spirit of religion and to Community life. The mutual amenities and concord of its members is what to a considerable extent constitutes the happiness of a Community. Hear what the Holy Spirit says by the mouth of David: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity: it is like the precious ointment on the head, that ran down upon the beard, the beard of Aaron, which

ran down to the skirt of his garment: as the dew of Hermon, or that which descendeth upon Mount Sion" (Ps. cxxxii. 1–3). Passion is like an icy blast which dries up that gentle dew and dissipates the fragrant perfume. It is an absolute necessity that the novice should become peaceable and gentle; unless he gain this conquest over self, life in community is out of the question for him, and nobody would vote for his admission. Was not Jesus, our Victim, pointed out to the bystanders by St. John Baptist as the *Lamb* of God, the lamb being the gentlest of animals?

A vindictive character is more to be dreaded than a passionate one, and the correction of this fault in the novice must be more obvious and persevering. An occasional display of temper is not incompatible with real kindness of heart; yet it so impairs that excellent quality that this sad fault must absolutely be got under. Now a revengeful spirit, on the contrary, argues the absence of all amiability, and I think it is not too much to say that a subject who should wilfully commit one serious act of revenge deserves to be dismissed without mercy. He would not only be a source of trouble to a religious house, he would be an object of fear.

9. Singularity.—Singularity shows itself in the most varied ways in actions, tendencies, claims, in short in its whole behavior. But in every case it unfits a postulant for the life of religion. St. Teresa, addressing her spiritual daughters, says in general: "Always avoid singularity as much as possible, since it is a very dangerous fault for the members of a Community."

Singularity in devotion must above and before all be pitilessly combated. It is truly an invention of the spirit of falsehood and malice to effect the ruin of souls and of monasteries as well, if the disease should prove contagious. All the saints kept a sharp lookout for this fault, and were

pitiless in denouncing it; in fact they were so determined to exclude this pest from the Orders they founded, that even when the singularity evidently proceeded from the operation of the Holy Spirit (as is by no means impossible) they preferred to incur the loss of really excellent subjects, even saints, than keep them to the prejudice of the Community life. Thus the great St. Pachomius sent away St. Mercarius, a man of eminent sanctity, for fear lest the extraordinary nature of his life might be harmful to the regularity of the House. For the same reason St. Simon Stylites was dismissed by the Superior of the monastery he had entered.

Yet in both the instances we have quoted, it was undoubtedly the Spirit of God who animated those illustrious recluses. Now cases such as these are very rare, and for one individual who, by the promptings of divine grace, is led to diverge to a slight extent from the ordinary way, there are hundreds, nay thousands, who in doing so are only actuated by self-love. Great firmness, great severity in fact, is wanted to extirpate this evil. If the grand saints of the Thebaid are lauded for their wisdom and prudence in sending away other saints who departed from the ordinary way, what ought not to be the rigor exercised by the Superiors of Religious Houses in dealing with subjects who threaten to upset everything by reason of the ridiculous vagaries suggested by their pride and folly?

God invariably inspires the saints whom He conducts by extraordinary ways with a real repugnance (this is not too strong a word) for these ways. Consequently any one who takes delight in them is unquestionably a dupe of the devil. The novice who has humbly offered his oblation in union with the spirit of the Infant Jesus, who was presented in the Temple by the hands of His holy Mother, will not fall a prey to this miserable delusion.

CHAPTER XI.

FAULTS OF CHARACTER CONTINUED. HOW THEY ARE TO BE CURED.

10. SENSUOUSNESS.—This bad quality may, if not corrected, greatly endanger the soul's welfare; and at all events it offers a serious obstacle to the acquisition of the fundamental virtues of the religious state.

There may be said to be three kinds of sensuality: mental, moral, and physical.

The first inclines the mind only to dwell upon pleasant thoughts, to indulge recollections that are agreeable, to create idle fancies and think of them with complacency, to give the preference to books which on account of the author's style or the subject he treats, flatter and gratify the imagination, etc.

The second awakens tender feelings, leads one to make friends with individuals who not only suit our taste but whose conversation and manners please us, whose person generally and even the features of their countenance attract us. (Alas! how undesirable in one who aspires to become the spouse of Our Lord in His character of Victim.) This fatal propensity leads to the formation of particular friendships, and it is well known how strongly they are condemned by all founders of Orders.

The third kind of sensuousness is that of the body. One's bearing and deportment, the attitudes assumed whether sitting or standing, complaints of the weather

when it is too hot or too cold, certain niceties about eating and drinking, fastidiousness about one's cell, one's bed, etc., dislikes which are expressed without scruple; all these things show that the soul is infected with that malady of which one ought to be ashamed, which is known as physical sensuality.

Owing to the weak and soft lines on which education is conducted in the present day, this evil is by no means rare, and is becoming daily more widespread. It is obviously a formidable enemy to the Christian life, even in the world; how much the more is it opposed to the life of the cloister?

11. Oversensitiveness.—This fault of character is in some way connected with the preceding one, but it seems to be less dangerous. Extreme sensitiveness is an indication of weakness of will, but it does not appear to be of a nature likely to entail serious harm to the soul that is subject to its sway; yet we find St. Francis of Sales speaking very severely of this peculiarity. "You tell me," he says to his spiritual daughters, "that there are some among you so sensitive that they can not bear to be reproved without becoming quite agitated, and often made ill by it. Well, if such is the case, one must show them the door; for if they, being sick, will not be treated for their malady, nor allow the proper remedies to be administered to effect their cure, it is plain that by so doing they become incorrigible and destroy all hope of their restoration to health. As for sensitiveness, whether moral or physical, it is one of the greatest hindrances to be met with in the religious life, and consequently the utmost care must be taken not to receive those who are deeply impregnated with it, because they will not be cured, and even refuse to make use of the means of cure."

12. Pusillanimity and Indolence.—Next to the want of intelligence this is perhaps the most incorrigible of faults. We have heard what Father Faber says in regard

to the ruling passion: "I have met with men who had succeeded in almost entirely conquering that terrible enemy. But I have never met with any one whose dominant passion was indolence and who contrived to vanquish the force of inertia." That is, in fact, the cause of our impotence, and it is no exaggeration to add, of the powerlessness of grace itself, the force of inertia. Grace has no hold on a character of this description. The slothful man does not himself possess the means of extricating himself from his unhappy condition; he has little or no self-knowledge, for self-knowledge supposes study of our own interior and exterior life, and painstaking labor connected with it. He has a horror of everything difficult, he shrinks from everything that will disturb his repose, he lives in a sort of moral apathy and vagueness of mind, and is perfectly contented with this state. Endeavor to arouse him out of it and you will find your remonstrances and your exertions little understood and still less appreciated.

Thus there is not much to be hoped for. When we speak of virtue it implies energy, vigor. The religious life implies a generous striving after justice, continual self-immolation unremitting sacrifice. Now energy, moral vigor, a generous tending toward what is good, self-surrender, sacrifice, are terms which either have no meaning for the pusillanimous soul or only serve to alarm her; consequently all hope must be given up of ever making her fit to be a spouse of the crucified God, a victim of His Sacred Heart.

Some prominent features have now been pointed out of those miserable faults of character, which are a hindrance even to admittance amongst the favored children of God, unless the necessary means for their correction are employed. Our nature is indeed evil and corrupt at the bottom. And how little as yet do we know it,

We have enumerated some of its sad, its deadly fruits; but how many other miseries would still have to be disclosed, how many ignominious sores would have to be probed, if we were to examine all the details of the life of the old man, the original life of each one of us. But we will go no further, and rest content with having said what are the principal faults which endanger and compromise our religious vocation. Let us now see if there is a remedy for our malady, or whether we have reason to despair because we are conscious of the miseries, the unruly passions within us.

We must never be discouraged; it is the worst thing that could happen to us, for there is a remedy for these moral obliquities, formidable as they are, and this remedy is a good will aided by divine grace.

St. Francis of Sales, speaking to his dear daughters of the Visitation on the subject of the various faults that postulants and novices may have, while acknowledging some of them to be very tiresome and to require special and close attention on the part of the Superiors, does not fail to say repeatedly that after all a novice must not be dismissed unless she is wilfully incorrigible; and, on the other hand, it is well to admit one who is endowed with a generous will, and is prepared resolutely to adopt the spiritual remedies given her for her cure. We quote the words of the saint, they are so wise and so encouraging:

"Certain faults ought not to stand in the way of admission to the novitiate, provided the postulant is anxious to improve, is willing to submit, and to make use of the medicaments suited to her case. And although great repugnance may be felt for these remedies, and they can only be swallowed with a great effort, that does not matter so long as she does not leave off making use of them; for physic is always bitter to the taste, and it is not possible to take it with as good a grace as if it were a palatable

potion. But for all that it does not fail to work, and is all the more efficacious the more pain and trouble it causes. Take for instance a young person of strong passions; she is irascible, several times she gives way to temper; still, if for all that she is desirous to be cured, if she wishes her Superiors to correct her, to mortify her, and prescribe what is needful for her cure, although the application of those remedies may be distasteful and trying, one must not refuse to vote for her when the time comes for her profession, for not only has she a good will, but she is willing to make use of the remedies given her for her cure, however painful and difficult this may be.

"There will be some among the novices who have been badly brought up, who are ill-bred and uncouth, or rough and rugged by nature. Doubtless they will experience far more trouble and difficulty than others who are naturally gentle and tractable, and they will commit more faults than those who are better bred; nevertheless, if they are anxious to be corrected and give proof of a firm determination to take the remedies, whatever they may cost them, I would give them my vote in spite of their failings."

Somewhat further on the saint adds: "The third thing which must be noticed is whether the novice has worked hard in her year of noviceship, if she has suffered and profited by the medicaments given her, if she has carried out the resolutions she made on entering the novitiate to correct her hasty temper and perverse inclinations, for the year's novitiate was given her for that purpose. If it be seen that she has persevered in her determination, and her will to make further progress remains firm and unaltered; if she has striven diligently to reform and form herself conformably to the Rule and Constitutions and still desires not to relax her efforts in future, that is a good sign and sufficient reason for giving her one's vote."

The gentle saint, writing to one or other of his daughters,

according to their several needs, says much the same as what he said in the Conferences addressed to the Community. For the instruction of novices we will allow ourselves to transcribe part of one of his letters.

"Do you know, my dear child, what a monastery really is? It is a school of correction in which every scholar should learn to let herself be manipulated, planed, and polished, in order that when all roughnesses are smoothed away she may be joined, jointed, and fixed more accurately in accordance with the will of God. The wish to be corrected is a clear mark of perfection.

"The monastery is also a hospital for the spiritually sick who desire to be cured, and for that purpose surrender themselves to be bled, to be operated upon with the lancet, to be seared with red-hot iron, to be scorched on the flame, to swallow the bitterest of medicaments. Thus, in the early ages of the Church, Religious were called Therapeutics, i.e., healers. Ponder upon that, my child, and do not heed what self-love may urge to the contrary, but make this resolution gently, lovingly. It is a choice between death and cure; and since the death of the soul is impossible, I desire to be cured; and in order to be cured I am determined to suffer correction, undergo the necessary treatment, and beg my physicians not to spare me any suffering that may advance my cure."

Hence we see how much importance St. Francis of Sales attached to a good will, which is always preceded and accompanied by divine grace. He despaired of no one who possessed it. It is the sacrificial blade which slowly, perhaps, but surely, achieves the slaughter of the victim; it is the fire on the altar which will ultimately consume the holocaust. The saint is so desirous that his admonition regarding the non-rejection of those novices who, notwithstanding their imperfections, prove by their efforts to amend that they are not incorrigible, should be

remembered and acted upon, that he repeats it at the conclusion of the Conference from which an extract has been given.

Let the young novice then take heart, and allow nothing to discourage him. The fact that he has been admitted into the novitiate is in itself a proof that his Superiors are disposed to have patience with him. Let him be simple, pliant, frank as a child; but let him at the same time aspire to become "a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ," as St. Paul says (Eph. iv. 13); and consequently he must be generous, constant, resolved to make any and every sacrifice. What graces, what peace, what holy joy will be the portion of such a one in the paradise of the religious profession!

CHAPTER XII.

ON RELIGIOUS SIMPLICITY.

After having discoursed so long about the *ego*, self, with its perverse tendencies, about the ruling passion and the different faults of character, subjects which at last prove wearisome and depressing, we will turn for a time to a more agreeable topic, and refresh our mind with the consideration and study of a virtue whose charm no one can resist: religious simplicity. This delightful flower flourishes in the mystic garden of the life of perfection; how delicious is its fragrance, how gladly the eye rests upon its bright and lovely blossom! Happy those who possess it and cultivate it with all the care it deserves. Happy the period of the novitiate, so favorable to the acquisition of this priceless treasure! Unknown to the world, it forms the wealth of the cloister, the joy, the happiness of all the Communities which are pleasing in God's sight. Sweet simplicity, blessed outpouring of the Heart of Jesus, celestial perfume emanating from the holy house at Nazareth, virtue beloved by and intimately connected with the earthly Trinity, precious foretaste of heavenly felicity!

Of this virtue we shall now attempt to speak, and we beg the novice to listen with more attention than ever. Great graces will be his portion if he appreciates the beauty of this wondrous virtue, if he relishes its sweetness, if he practises it lovingly. A novice who is truly simple, simple as were the saints, is a consolation to the Heart of

Jesus, and a blessing to the whole Community where he is. We will explain to him in what simplicity really consists, and how it is to be practised in the novitiate so as to have it for a friend and companion during the remainder of his life here below.

Simplicity is a virtue which restores us to and establishes us in *unity*, just as the contrary vice, craftiness, makes us *double;* that is why the name of duplicity is often given to that vice. But what we have said needs explanation: *it is a virtue which restores us to and establishes us in unity*, or oneness. These words are somewhat obscure. They signify that a soul which is simple, simple with the supernatural simplicity of the children of God, has but one single aim, one single eye, one single intention in all that it does. It does not tend toward two ends, but toward one only; and what is the object of this single aim, this single purpose—what is this one, this sole end?

It is God, God only; His will alone, His good pleasure alone, His interests alone, His glory alone. But we will listen to St. Francis of Sales, since the subject we are considering is a favorite one with him.

"In the first place," he says, "we must know what this virtue of simplicity is. You know that we generally call a material simple if it is not embroidered, and is without lining; for instance, we say of a person that she is dressed very simply because her gown is not made of figured stuff, or elaborately trimmed, or fashioned so that the lining is seen; but the whole costume is made of one material, and made very plainly. Simplicity, then, is nothing more or less than an act of charity pure and simple, which has this one only object, to acquire the love of God, and we are simple of heart when we have no ulterior purpose in all that we do.

"The story, which is so familiar to all of us, of the two sisters of Bethania, Martha and Mary, who entertained

Our Lord, may be recalled most appropriately here; for do you not see that Martha, although her intention, her wish to entertain Our Lord well, was praiseworthy, was yet reproved by the divine Master, because besides the laudable object she proposed to herself in her activity, she regarded Our Lord too much as man, and thus she thought He was like other guests, for whom it was not enough to serve one dish, to prepare an ordinary meal, and on that account she exerted herself very much in order to set a more elaborate repast before Him; and in thus busying herself she added to her primary motive, the love of God, several other minor and secondary motives and intentions, and for these Our Lord reproved her, saying: 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary: Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken from her.'

"This act of single-minded charity then, which causes us to have no other end or aim in all our actions but the sole desire to please God, is the part Mary chose, the one alone necessary, and that is simplicity; a virtue inseparable from charity, the more so because it looks direct to God, without tolerating any admixture of self-interest; otherwise it would no longer be simplicity, for simplicity or singleness of aim must be free from any undercurrent of creature interests, any consideration of human things; God must be all in all. The pagans, even those amongst them who discoursed most eloquently about the other virtues, knew nothing of this one, any more than of humility."

Thus the simple soul is the one who, illumined by the light of faith, and following it alone as her guide, looks to God as her final end, and is only anxious to please Him, without any human considerations. The perfect amity which results from this is evident in all her actions.

In a soul of this nature one does not find one way of thinking and another of speaking. Her words express her thoughts. Is it possible to deceive almighty God by utterances which were at variance with the inward thought? Is not God the searcher of hearts and reins?

In like manner the single-minded soul does not act in two different ways, one in secret and the other in public. Her behavior is the same always and everywhere; and if some diversities are noticeable, it is only what is required by charity, or for the sake of conformity to the rules of good-breeding; she is not actuated by human respect, the desire to please her fellow-creatures and gain their esteem, but by the consciousness that in altering her conduct she is acting in conformity with the good pleasure of God, in obedience to the laws of Christian discretion which He Himself ordained.

In the practice of virtue her simplicity is yet more apparent. In the authority of the Church she sees God alone, and consequently her faith is simple, unquestioning, unfaltering, unconditional, whether in respect to an ancient dogma or to a recently defined truth.

Her hope also is simple, because of the knowledge which she has acquired through faith of the promises of God, and His immutable fidelity in fulfilling them; and the spirit of abandonment of herself to divine Providence and to His action in her regard causes her to rest simply, fearlessly, and confidingly in His hands. Finally, her charity toward God is full of filial simplicity because it is unalloyed; simplicity leading her to refer everything to Him, lovingly, unreservedly, invariably, with childlike affection.

And this same spirit pervades every act of virtue. Simplicity is a disposition of the soul which is universal in its influence. It enters into all that we do; and for the matter of that, it is necessary that it should do so, if our works are to be pleasing to God, since by it alone

are they referred back to God, their first beginning. Here perhaps we see the true meaning of Our Lord's words: "If thy eye be single thy whole body shall be lightsome" (Matt. vi. 22). *Thy whole body*, that is, thy life in its entirety. What in fact would mortification be worth if it were not single in its aim? And charity toward our neighbor? or our zeal, our pious practices, our modesty, patience, and all other virtues?

Such is supernatural simplicity, the single-mindedness of the true children of God. It is clearly indispensable to the perfection of the Christian life, and accordingly to the religious life. It is essential to the latter because it is in itself the perfection of the Christian life; but, as we have already frequently remarked, to speak of the perfect Christian life is equivalent to speaking of the life of perfect self-surrender. It does indeed become the victim to be single-minded, that is to say, to be all for God, for His good pleasure and His glory. What is his state? In whose presence does he live? To whom is his life, his being dedicated, all that he has or is? His state is to be bound upon the altar of God; he is continually in the presence of God, who directs and observes all that he does; he exists only for God. He belongs absolutely and entirely to the God who accepted his oblation of himself, who is the sole end of his self-immolation. Hence nothing is more simple than the victim, no state more perfect in its single-mindedness than his. How great the graces, the divine favors which will assuredly be bestowed on him!

Such simple souls are moreover a blessing to their Community. St. Francis of Assisi exclaimed in reference to Brother Juniper, who was a model of religious simplicity: "Would that I had a whole forest of such juniper-trees!"

Not only are simple souls a benediction to the Community, they constitute its special charm. Simplicity in

speech, in demeanor, in behavior, in the very expression of one's countenance; simplicity in bearing patiently with the faults of others, in showing sympathy with one's neighbor and commiserating him when he is in trouble; in the charity, self-devotion, alacrity, cordiality wherewith a service is rendered. How touching, how attractive is this amiable virtue, this revelation of the Heart of Jesus and the heart of His holy Mother! What peace, what happiness this truly celestial grace sheds all around!

Thus one may almost say God becomes perceptible, visible in the soul that is endowed with the grace of simplicity. For, as Fr. Grou observes, interior simplicity is reflected on the outward man; and the clear-sighted eye will experience no difficulty in distinguishing between two pious persons, judging by their mien, their physiognomy, their manner of speech, their gestures, their bearing, which is the one whose heart is simple. It is impossible to delineate the impress God stamps upon the countenance, the very look of the eyes and tone of the voice, the general deportment of the individual who is His own possession. Every one is struck by the effect produced by this admirable virtue, though but few know the cause of it: inward singleness, simplicity, reflected on the exterior person.

God dwells in such a soul, and she abides in Him; in this all is said. In her every action her eyes are fixed solely on Him who is her first beginning and her final end. She has not a single glance to spare for herself. Were she to look both on God and on herself, her eye would not be single, and duplicity would consequently enter in. But God forbid! For her it is: God alone. She does not ask herself: What do people think of me? Do not they consider me to be kind, affable, modest, recollected, patient? Such a thought can never enter her mind, or if it does, through a freak of the fancy, she rejects it with

horror. But if such a thought should occur to one just at the commencement of the Christian life, one may safely affirm that it is not possible that it should occur at the end, when the soul has succeeded in detaching herself from everything human which is of a double nature, many-sided and involved, and finding her rest in God, who is alone essential unity. And since she refers all to this one end, as all she does is focussed in this single center, she does not depart from unity, and thus she is always admirably simple. Nor is she inconstant in her practice of charity, patience, self-devotion. How could she be so? If she acted with a view to creatures or to self, she might become so, because the good pleasure of all creatures is subject to change, and those who follow it in its vagaries become variable as they are. But the holy will of God is immutable. We always know how to please Him. We need not be uneasy as to what His judgments of us will be if our intention is upright and pure. Such is the peace, the tranquillity, the unity in which the soul rests; this forms a kind of unbroken union with God and a settled abode in Him, which is the commencement of eternal bliss.

Happy the novice who attains to the possession of this priceless favor! Happy the novitiate who can boast a large number of novices who exhale the celestial perfume of religious simplicity!

We will now proceed to see what are the delicious fruits which simplicity bears in the practice of the virtue most indispensable in the novitiate.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON SIMPLICITY IN THE PRACTICE OF OBEDIENCE.

We propose to treat of obedience and its various characteristics in the third part of this work, which will be devoted to the consideration of the religious vows; but whilst still speaking of the novitiate, we can not pass by this fair virtue which is so important a factor in training the novice. We shall therefore consider that characteristic of obedience which is most necessary at the commencement of the religious life, i.e., simplicity.

The young novice will do well to take as addressed to himself the exhortation of St. Paul to the Philippians: "Be blameless and sincere, children of God" (Phil. ii. 13). The novice is in fact quite specially the child of God. Whatever his age may be when he enters the novitiate, he ought to consider himself as being still in those early years of life when one has everything to learn, and that without self-assertion or opposition, but in the simplest, most childlike manner. He may appropriately apply to himself these words of St. Peter with all humility: "As newborn babes desire the rational milk (the milk of religious perfection) without guile. *Sicut modo geniti infantes*" (I. Peter ii. 2).

If the novice is a child, he will want a guide. Obedience is that guide. To its direction he must surrender himself as if he had no will of his own. It will lead him without fail to the blessed end of his vocation, which is relig-

ious perfection. Simplicity in obedience is the supernatural frame of mind which makes us see God in the Master of Novices, the divine will in his will; and this must be done without hesitation, without putting one's own construction upon it; one must merely obey. St. Aloysius Gonzaga, the model and patron of novices, is reported to have said: "Every Superior is the lieutenant of Jesus Christ, and since Jesus Christ is infinite wisdom, He makes His representatives infallible in regard to their subjects." It is this exalted and holy view which faith takes of obedience that gives it the beautiful and touching character of religious simplicity.

Simple obedience has two marked characteristics: 1. Human judgment has no part in it; 2. It is free from all dissimulation. We will proceed to examine these characteristics.

1. Human judgment has no part in it.

When the Superior speaks, it is God Himself who speaks; there is nothing more to be said. It is a matter of perfect indifference what the action to be performed may be, whether difficult or easy, pleasant or painful to nature. The command given is not to be looked at critically, we must not seek to discover the motives actuating him who issued it; in it we must only see the divine behest, which can not be wrong, the divine will made known to us by the lips of the Superior; that is enough for one who is truly obedient and single-minded, whose will is upright and simple as his heart.

St. Gregory (Pope) says: "One who is really obedient does not scrutinize the purpose of his Superior or discuss the orders given him, because he has entirely submitted his own judgment. His delight is to do what he is bid. Obedience makes him happy."

Such were the novices in the deserts of the Thebaid. Listen to the account of the novitiate of Paul the Simple;

this example and the following one, contrasting so forcibly as they do with the effeminacy, with the spirit of self-sufficiency and of pride that prevail in our own day, must not be regarded as an exaggeration. It would be a misfortune for us did we deem them such.

When Paul, surnamed the Simple on account of his extraordinary integrity and simplicity, addressed himself to St. Antony (he was the first to express the wish to share the life of the Father of Anchorites), the patriarch informed him that the first virtue required in a novice was obedience, and that he could not hope to succeed in becoming his disciple, and persevering in the life he proposed to adopt, unless he obeyed implicitly the orders given him. Paul promised to do so in the sincerity of his heart. Then the trials of the novitiate began for him. The first proof of submission which Antony required of him was to remain at prayer outside his cell, and not to stir until some work was brought for him to do; meanwhile the saint, shut up in his cell, looked out of the window furtively from time to time to see if his disciple was acquitting himself of his prescribed task. He left him kneeling there exposed to the scorching sun during the day, and to the cold at night; Paul never changed his place or his posture, or ceased his prayers.

After this long and painful trial, in which the saint could not refrain from admiring the simplicity and patience he had so severely tested, he brought his novice some branches of palm, and told him to copy the way in which he plaited them; but when Paul's work was finished, he found fault with it, and said it must be undone and done over again; this made the task longer and more arduous, but Paul set himself to it without allowing his countenance to show the slightest sign of annoyance.

Thus Paul, the first disciple of St. Antony, began his noviceship. He simply abandoned himself unreservedly

to the guidance of his saintly director. He saw God in his person, the adorable will of God in every order he issued; and nothing could make him think differently, not even the harshness of the commands or the apparent contradictions involved in them.

It was with similar and no less admirable dispositions that the Ven. John the Dwarf and his brother presented themselves to a hermit who dwelt in the desert and was excessively austere in his manner of life. His great solicitude was to form disciples in whom the life of nature should be completely extinguished, and whose only impulses should be the impulses of grace. For this reason, we are told, he required all who asked for admission into his monastery to be prepared to have no will of their own. Only on this condition would he consent to receive them. Therefore when John and his brother presented themselves he took care to question them concerning this most essential point; and on their promising to submit blindly to whatever he might prescribe, he undertook to train them. They were soon required to give proof of their sincerity. The old man, taking up a stick which chanced to be lying there, and which had been dried up for a long time, thrust it into the ground and ordered John the Dwarf to water it every day until it bore fruit. This command was all the more difficult of execution because the spring whence the water had to be fetched was at a distance of two miles, and he was obliged to go for it at nightfall and could not return until the next morning. For two years he persevered in this arduous toil without the stick showing any sign of life. At length, when the third year came, God was pleased to reward his obedience openly by a miracle. The dry branch, contrary to all anticipation, came out into leaf and produced a number of fruits. These the Superior carried to the church where the hermits were assembled and distributed them to them, saying: "Eat of these,

all of you, my brethren, they are the fruits of obedience."

Postumian, who visited Egypt in 402, certified to Sulpicius Severus that he had himself seen the tree in question in full leaf in the courtyard of the monastery. And it is said that even to this day there is a monastery in Egypt dedicated to the holy recluse, where a tree is shown which is believed to be the original one, and is consequently known as the *tree of obedience.* If this be true, its existence at this time would be a fresh miracle.

From this we see what manner of men were John the Dwarf and the master he chose to direct him, and how God recompensed by a miracle the perfect simplicity of the obedience shown by the fervent novice. In fact, divine Providence has often been pleased to manifest His approval of this marvelous simplicity by a miracle. We read that one day St. Benedict bade his disciple, St. Maurus, go to the rescue of a brother who was drowning; Maurus obeyed, walking on the water as on dry land. The illustrious Mother Anne of St. Bartholomew, who founded the Carmelites in France in the beginning of the seventeenth century, did not know how to write when she entered upon the religious life. One day St. Teresa told her to take a pen and write at her dictation; Anne did so and became the saint's secretary. The writer of these pages was acquainted with a Superior, since departed this life in the odor of sanctity, who when one of her subjects was ill, bade her go to the Blessed Virgin and in her name tell her to cure her. With childlike simplicity the obedient Religious executed the order given her; she addressed herself to the Mother of all Consolation and was cured immediately.

These instances, which might be multiplied indefinitely, are not inserted here in order that Masters of Novices may think themselves warranted to do what saints were specially

inspired by God to do under rare circumstances; but as a proof of the pleasure that the God of love takes in simple obedience, and the consolation which the novice gives to His Sacred Heart, when, only seeing the divine will in that of his Superior, he goes forward in the path of obedience without listening to the dictates of human reason.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON SIMPLICITY IN THE PRACTICE OF OBEDIENCE (CONTINUED).

We have seen for our consolation that in simple obedience human reasoning, human judgment have no part. Simple obedience is also free from dissimulation.

2. Simple obedience is obedience without any disguise. It excludes two most odious vices: hypocrisy and cunning. We should much prefer to pass over these two scourges of the religious life without mention, but it is necessary to inspire the young novice with an extreme detestation of them.

Some minds are naturally inclined to act with cunning and deceit; they are greatly to be pitied. Such persons obey, it is true, but from motives of human respect or of policy; they are desirous not to incur blame, and to stand well with the Master or Mistress of Novices. They readily obey their Superior when he gives the order in person, but when it comes from one whose authority is that of a delegate, their obedience is imperfect and half-hearted. When their master's eye is on them, they are all alacrity and zeal; when he is absent, they do as little as possible. St. Paul says: "Be obedient . . . with fear and trembling in the simplicity of your heart as to Christ; not serving to the eye as it were pleasing men, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with a good will" (Eph. vi. 5–7). But the persons of whom we speak understand nothing of this doctrine. For

them obedience is a disagreeable necessity, and they only do what they are told because they think it is for their own advantage.

Now this kind of obedience is almost a profanation of the word. Obedience is ordained by God, and they degrade it to a human institution. What they treat with contempt is a divine grace; they defile a celestial stream, they convert a remedy into a poison. Thus having every appearance of this virtue, but not practising it in reality, they are hypocrites, victims whom God rejects as He did the offerings of Cain; they seem to immolate themselves, to offer their neck to the sword of obedience, whereas they sacrifice obedience to their self-love and duplicity. God grant that the pious novice may hold such conduct in due horror, and remember the terrible utterance of the Holy Spirit: "The deceitful man the Lord will abhor" (Ps. v. 7).

There is another vice closely resembling hypocrisy, and that is cunning. My God, what a terrible fault! Some unhappy souls of a low order seem to possess an instinctive propensity for it. In order to elude the rule of obedience, the fulfilment of an order which their Superior has given or is about to give them, or to shirk the duties of some office which he intends to entrust to them or one from which they want to be released, they will with feigned humility allege their incapacity for it; the harm that might accrue in consequence to the cause of religion or to the Community; they will protest that they are willing to accept any other post, to execute any other commission, but as for that which is commanded them, they are quite unsuited for it, it is really beyond their powers. At other times they will pretend to be indisposed, or suffering pain; or again, they will do what they are told to do, but acquit themselves of the task badly, giving out that their ill success does not arise from lack of a good will,

but of the requisite strength or skill. What miserable subterfuges are these! At what a low ebb the spiritual life must be, if indeed such pusillanimity does not presuppose that the spiritual life is altogether extinct in God's sight!

We will stop here; it is too painful to dwell on such sad, such pitiable topics. It is to be hoped that the novice will hold in abhorrence such mean artifices, that they will excite his indignation and he will recall to mind the words of Holy Scripture: "Deceitful souls go astray in sins" (Prov. xiii. 13), and "no good shall come to the deceitful son" (ib. xiv. 15).

St. Dositheus, the disciple of St. Dorotheus, was of a very different stamp. Open and candid, he was a perfect model of that filial, ingenuous simple obedience which is the delight of Superiors. We will give an incident out of his life, the perusal of which will serve to remove the unpleasant impression made by the details into which we have just been entering.

The malady which proved fatal to him was an affection of the chest, with frequent hemorrhages from the lungs. He had always sanctified himself by obedience, and this virtue shone out brilliantly toward the close of the brief career of this youthful and fervent novice.

He had been told that new-laid eggs were useful in stopping the hemorrhages, and the thought of this simple remedy, which required no preparation, frequently recurred to his mind. One day he told his spiritual Father, St. Dorotheus, of it, for he was in the habit of never concealing anything from him. "Father," he said, "I have been told of a remedy which it was thought might prove beneficial to me, and I should like to tell you of it; yet at the same time I beg that you will not prescribe it for me, because the idea comes into my mind too often, and I allow my thoughts to dwell on it too much." "Tell me,"

St. Dorotheus replied, "what the remedy is that you speak of." "It is to take new-laid eggs," he answered; "but I entreat you for God's sake not to take notice of what I say, because I do not want to have anything I may myself fancy, but only what you may please to give me of your own accord." "Very well," St. Dorotheus rejoined, "I will do as you wish; keep quiet, and do not trouble yourself about it." Everything else but this one thing was given to the sick youth which was thought likely to restore him to health, but he only grew worse.

One day, on St. Barsanuphius coming to see him, he said to him: "Father, tell me to die, for I can not hold out any longer." "Be patient, my son," the saint replied, "yet a little longer; the moment is not far distant when God will have mercy upon you." St. Dorotheus, who watched constantly beside him and saw how terribly he suffered, began to fear lest the devil should tempt him to impatience and thus tarnish the glory of his crown. But a short time afterward Dositheus again turned to St. Barsanuphius, and said in a calm and gentle voice: "Father, I can not live any longer." Then that eminent saint answered: "Now depart in peace, my dear son; enter into the presence of the Most Holy Trinity, and pray for us." Thereupon, the historian relates, the blessed child of obedience tranquilly slept the sleep of the just, as if rocked to rest in the bosom of that fair virtue which had acted the part of a foster-mother to him in the religious life, and had trained him in sweet and solid piety.

The same writer adds that the Religious who were present at the young novice's death were astonished at St. Barsanuphius speaking with such confidence to him of his salvation. They even began to express aloud their surprise and disapproval. What right, they asked, had the departed to receive so consoling an assurance at the moment of death? What had he done to deserve it? What

great deeds had he accomplished? They only judged by the extraordinary austerities practised by some of the other monks, and could not understand that Brother Dositheus had in a few years attained a height of perfection greater far than the most fervent brethren could hope to reach by macerating their bodies and by practising various mortifications.

They failed to apprehend this, because they did not appreciate the excellence of the virtue which consists in dying to one's own will. Before long it pleased God to show those monks how unjust and mistaken they had been in their judgment, and let them know to what a high degree of glory the fervent novice had been raised on account of the perfection wherewith he practised obedience. A short time after his death, a recluse of eminent virtue came to the monastery, and having humbly prayed God to make known to him the merit and the glory of the Religious who had departed this life in that house, he was privileged to behold them all assembled as if in choir, and amongst the aged monks he perceived a youthful novice. The sight of this young man aroused his wonder; he wished to know why he was there, and carefully observed his features, his height, his person generally, in order to learn who he was, and what the reason could be of the extraordinary honor shown him in giving him a place amongst the veteran recluses.

From the description he gave of him, the Brothers had no difficulty in recognizing St. Dositheus. They were deeply touched by this revelation of the great merit of the pious novice; and from that time forth they understood better how precious in God's sight is perfect obedience on the part of those who have the happiness of being consecrated to His service.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE LOVE WHICH THE NOVICE OUGHT TO HAVE FOR THE SOLITUDE OF THE NOVITIATE.

The novitiate is in truth a seclusion, because in it the novice lives far removed from the world, far from its turmoil, its business, its anxieties, its cares, its deceptive joys, its many sorrows.

To love the solitude and seclusion of the novitiate is a great proof of a vocation to the religious life; while dislike of it, and weariness of it, if voluntary, may perhaps be considered as an indication that the novice has mistaken, or does not correspond to, the graces of his vocation.

There is so much consolation to be enjoyed in this solitude. St. Bernard says of it: "O blessed solitude! O sole beatitude! *O beata solitudo! O sola beatitudo!* There one breathes a purer air, there Heaven is more propitious, there God is nearer to us!"

If the religious life is the paradise of this poor world of exile, the novitiate is the paradise of that paradise.

Happy place of sojourn! Not until one has left it does one fully realize all its blessedness. It is the abode of peace, of light, of true life.

The novice is like the tree spoken of by the Psalmist which is planted near the running waters, whose leaf shall not fall off, and which shall bear forth its fruit in due season.

He is the Benjamin of the Religious family; on him are

centered all the attention, all the good wishes of the other brethren; the prayers, the good examples, the wise counsels, the affection of all are given to him, because they know to how great an extent the future of the Order depends on him.

Oh, happy time, when the truth is told us concerning our virtues, our duties, our faults, our needs!

Oh, happy time, when the will is most pliant, the heart most sensitive, most open to receive the guidance, the influence of grace!

It is a holy and a happy year; and the blessings enjoyed in it are an earnest, a pledge of holiness in this life and of glory in the world to come.

Therefore we may well say happy, a thousand times happy, is the novice if he does but appreciate his good fortune. But the happiness he enjoys is entirely spiritual, consequently it does not exclude crosses, privations, sacrifice. This we have already seen in the commencement of the second part of this book. Sacrifice is the natural condition of the Religious; he is a victim, a burnt-offering, and the novitiate is the place of preparation wherein the holocaust is perfected which the novice will offer on the day of his profession and will renew daily for the remainder of his life.

The sacrifices imposed upon us by the seclusion of the novitiate are two in number: 1. Separation from the world by severing all connection with it that is not absolutely indispensable, and 2. Cessation of all intercourse with relatives as far as charity permits. We will proceed to explain these two points.

1. Separation from the World.—The following words, uttered by St. Paul, are indeed applicable to every Christian, but the Religious in particular ought to adopt them as his motto: *Mihi mundus crucifixus est, et ego mundo.* "The world is crucified to me and I to the world" (Gal. vi. 14). St. John Chrysostom, commenting upon

them, says: "It was not enough for the Apostle to assert that the world was dead to him, he must needs add that he himself was dead to the world. He doubtless took into consideration the fact that not only do the living entertain feelings of affection for one another, but they retain somewhat the same sentiments for the dead; they cherish their memory, and if they do no more, they give honorable sepulture to their remains. Therefore the holy Apostle, desirous to make us understand the full extent to which the faithful Christian ought to be detached from the pleasures of time and sense, adds: It is not enough that all intercourse between the world and the Christian should be broken off, as completely as it is between the living and the dead, because a certain connection is still kept up between them; the Christian should stand in the same relation to the world as one defunct person does to another."

The novice will do well to bear in mind this last observation and frequently say to himself: "No agreement of any kind is possible between the world and myself. I ought to live in respect to it as one dead man to another, nay more, if possible not merely to regard it with absolute indifference, but with feelings of continual opposition. The world is godless and I am consecrated to God. The world follows maxims which are suggested to it by none other than the spirit of evil, and I have, I can have, no other rule than that of Christ crucified. The world chooses the broad way that leads to perdition, while my road is the narrow way that leads to life." Never let the novice forget that these are the conditions imposed on him by the divine vocation. Our Lord said to him as He said to the apostles: "You are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world" (John xv. 19). Of course he loves unhappy sinners, loves them tenderly, devotedly, and prays for them; for their salvation he offers his penances, his sacrifices; but he

is careful to hold aloof from them, not to approach them or be subject to their influence. One great privilege of his present state is that he lives apart, that he is removed from all intercourse with them, and hears nothing of their affairs or their conversation. He must be convinced that unless he remained in this seclusion, he could never fully and truly obtain the blessings attached to his vocation.

There are some Religious who have never participated to the fullest extent in that celestial gift which is the grace, the spirit peculiar to the religious vocation. This may be the result of various causes, but very often it is due to not having broken off sufficiently with the world on entering the novitiate.

We will therefore give the novice a few words of practical counsel on this point.

Connection with the world may be kept up: (1) By allowing one's thoughts to dwell on one's former intercourse with the world; (2) By means of letters; (3) By visits to the parlor.

(1) First of all, then, one of the most important and weighty obligations for the novice, if he is desirous of preserving his interior peace and, above all, of removing out of his way an obstacle of extreme danger for his salvation, is *to obliterate from his mind all remembrance of his life in the world.* The past ought to appear to him so distant, so indistinct, as to leave no definite impression; and by means of prayer, of simple and serene watchfulness over himself, of diligent application to the duties of his new life, he ought after a time to regard his memories of bygone days as something foreign to himself; his merry, thoughtless childhood, his youth, when the heat of passion first made itself felt; his friendships, his connections more or less intimate; the business in which he perhaps engaged for a time; all this ought to be consigned to oblivion. Possibly he may later on be compelled by force of circum-

stances to renew some of his former relations; but there is a period in which all ought to be purified as by fire in order to eliminate the dangerous element from the things of earth, and the novitiate is that period.

It may be regarded as the interval which elapses between a man's death and his resurrection. The novice is in a sepulcher. Later on he will perhaps be obliged by charity or duty to occupy himself with worldly matters, but in that case he will do so with the feelings of one who has risen from the grave.

(2) LETTERS.—It is to be desired that these should be as rare as possible. The novice is to be congratulated who only writes one; still more happy he who never writes any. On this point the saints have left us memorable examples, not only the hermits whose lives we consider so admirable, but those also of more recent times. We are aware that it is the fashion of the present day to write a great many letters, and in fact it has become such a universal custom as to seem almost compulsory. To make one's self a complete exception to the general custom would perhaps not only be ill-judged, but might hurt or offend persons in the world who have conferred benefits upon us. The Master of Novices must decide whether some letters are not advisable under certain circumstances or at certain seasons. He will not forget that to return in thought to the world is, especially in the case of young novices, apt to give rise to many distractions and sometimes dangerous temptations.

But, it may be asked, is it not useful to write letters of direction? We do not think so. There is, however, no rule without exception, and in a given case a novice might be the better for a word from his former confessor, or from a priest whom he had chanced to consult, in a retreat, for instance. Here again the Master of Novices can alone judge what is best. But let the novice be fully

persuaded that divine grace, which called him to the House of God, prepared beforehand all that was needful and useful for his sanctification; as a rule, the more he takes delight in solitude, the dearer will that solitude be to him; and when he has tasted its sweetness, not only will all wish to leave it vanish, but he will experience a real repugnance for all that is calculated to disturb its profound peace and celestial tranquillity.

(3) The Parlor.—On this point we have very little to say to the devout novice, who seldom has occasion to go down to the parlor. Ordinarily it is his parents or members of his family who ask for him, and we purpose to speak of intercourse with relatives in the next chapter. But whatever the reason that compels him to emerge from the depths of his seclusion, he must not omit to take precautions, simply but seriously, against the dangers that infallibly await him in the parlor. Before going thither let him ask the blessing of Mary, the Queen and Patroness of the novitiate, and also that of the Master of Novices; and let him beg his angel guardian to accompany him.

If, on a cold winter's day, the window of a well-warmed room is opened, the hot air of the interior quickly escapes, and the cold air from without pours in, reducing by many degrees the agreeable warmth of the temperature. Now this well-warmed room represents the seclusion of the novitiate, in the midst of the icy cold of the world, and the window which, being opened, dispels the genial warmth of the interior, is the parlor. The novice will do well to reflect upon this. Whether he belongs to a cloistered or a non-cloistered Order, he is equally a victim offered up to God. His place is on the steps of the altar, not at the window of the temple.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE RELATIONS TO BE MAINTAINED BETWEEN NOVICES AND THE MEMBERS OF THEIR FAMILY.

THE first sacrifice which the seclusion of the novitiate demands from the novice is separation from the world; the second is:

2. CESSATION OF ALL INTERCOURSE WITH RELATIVES AS FAR AS CHARITY PERMITS.—The subject on which we now have to speak is a very delicate one. We have no intention of saying anything that is not in keeping with the spirit that animated the saints, yet we can not avoid wounding the heart of the young novice. Listen, favored child of God.

Compromise is now the order of the day; everywhere one observes a tendency to reconcile the spirit of the world with the spirit of piety, to make the religious life consistent with some habits of a secular life. The world asks so much from those who, in virtue of their state, are bound to condemn it, while they on their part persuade themselves that it is very extreme to keep to the maxims and imitate the life of the ancient monks, and thus, unhappily, a kind of mutual toleration is brought about, and the vigor of ancient discipline is apparently relaxed.

In regard to the relations to be maintained between persons consecrated to God and the members of their family, the view taken and the conduct pursued by many

Religious in our own day differ from the examples we find in the annals of hagiology and the rules left to us by the founders of Orders. But the practice that has obtained is so widespread that one is inclined to regard as exaggerated what some of the most esteemed authors have written on the subject, to wit, Rodriguez, in his treatise on Christian perfection, and St. Teresa in her various works. Yet we will quote these writers, and do so with confidence, with the conviction that their words will not be useless to Religious, who require to be reminded of the weighty instructions of those who have the right to speak authoritatively. Besides, the spirit of the religious life is the same now as it was then, and certainly it is not for the world, with its spirit, its assumption of a right to meddle in holy things, to claim the prerogative of modifying, rules that have been respected for ages, and approved by the greatest saints.

It is our wish from the outset to banish everything that could have the appearance of being exaggerated, still more erroneous. One thing is certain, and that is that the love Religious, and novices in particular, owe to their parents can undergo no change; no, it is unchangeable; and the respect, the gratitude due to them must never suffer any diminution. This affection and this gratitude are founded on the law of God, and that law is immutable; however, the acts whereby they are manifested are different in a Religious to what they are in one who lives in the world. We say they are different, and we add, without fear of contradiction, that the difference does the Religious credit, and is to the advantage of his parents.

Real affection does, in fact, lead us to desire and seek to obtain the best gifts for those who are dear to us. Now the best gifts are the gifts of grace. What will the Religious do to testify his affection and pay his debt of gratitude toward the authors of his being? He will pray frequently

for them, pray fervently, insistently; he will ask for his father, for his mother, for his other relatives grace to meet the trials of life with resignation; its prosperity, its few delights with humility. He will constantly beseech the God of mercy to afford them the means of expiating their sins, of continuing in His holy friendship, of increasing in it as they pass through the vicissitudes of this present life. And if he hears that their end is approaching, he will assist them with renewed supplications, and to his own petitions those of the Community will be added. And when it pleases God to take them out of this exile, these same prayers, fervent, heartfelt, persevering, will be offered for their relief from the purgatorial fires. Indeed love, gratitude, fond attachment can never, never grow cold in the heart where divine charity dwells. Our own daily experience warrants us in asserting, on the contrary, that behind the monastery grille, beneath the religious habit, the most tender, most affectionate hearts are to be found. And why is this? Because these hearts are not scorched by the blast of egoism which prevails throughout the world, nor hardened by the considerations of material interest which unhappily wither and destroy the natural affection of many sons and daughters in the world. Moreover, on whose hearts is the remembrance of loved ones departed most deeply, most lastingly impressed? Ordinary justice compels us to answer on the hearts of those who, having learned the true value of time and of eternity, on that account feel it to be their duty never to forget those who are no more, and who, even after the lapse of years, may still stand in need of our suffrages.

Yes, of that the world, often unjust in its complaints, may rest assured. The devout novice will never allow the steady, permanent flame of affection, filial, fraternal affection, to die out of his heart; but he will not allow it to agitate or unsettle him, to make him long for external

intercourse unbefitting his state; he will not inquire too anxiously about matters which may engage the attention of his relatives in the world, their joys or sorrows; he will not want to hear from them or write to them very often, to send messages, to hear about business affairs, to get them to come to the monastery, or to be allowed to visit them himself. In short, apart from the communication which obedience and strict duty compel him to keep up with his relatives, the fervent novice ought to model his conduct in accordance with St. Paul's words: "They are crucified to me and I to them."

If the reader desires grave and solid instruction on this point, let him read, we will not say the counsels of the Fathers of the desert, since it may be urged that, as they were pledged to a life of absolute solitude, a different rule must apply, but Fr. Rodriguez, whose wisdom and moderation is universally admired. Now his treatise on Christian and Religious perfection was written for the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, whose vocation is not to lead a hermit's life, but one of active apostolic work. In the fifth division of the second part the salutary doctrine of the saints and their examples will be found. The titles alone of the different chapters will give an idea of their substance; e.g., Ch. 1. How important it is for the novice not to visit and stay with his relatives. Ch. 2. A Religious ought to abstain from revisiting his native place, even for the purpose of preaching; and so on, Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7.

It will be seen that the illustrious Jesuit is somewhat severe. We quote the conclusion he comes to about the middle of the last chapter: "Whoever, therefore, desires to attain the end which he ought to have proposed to himself, on going into religion, must give up all intercourse with his near relatives, and not take the least part in the care or management of their temporal concerns. For 'who hath said to his father and to his mother: I do not

know you; and to his brethren: I know you not; and their own children they have not known. These have kept Thy word and observed Thy covenant'" (Deut. xxxiii 9). Could there be more forcible language than this?

And it must be remembered that the author is writing for Religious who have finished their novitiate, and who consequently would seem to be less exposed to receive any prejudicial effect from intercourse with their parents; what would he not have said, how much more strongly still would he not have spoken if he had only addressed novices. For heaven's sake let us not neglect the counsels, the admonitions, the experience of the saints.

From Rodriguez we will turn to St. Teresa, the weight of whose dictum no one will question. The illustrious Reformer of Carmel is common sense personified; indeed I acknowledge that I scarcely know whether in her writings I am not struck by her marvelous good sense, the perfect accuracy of her views even more than by the wondrous graces bestowed on her by the divine Spouse. At any rate we may learn much that is of practical use to us in the religious life from her good sense and uncommon wisdom. Let us listen to her pronouncements with due attention.

"If we who are Religious knew how much harm we derive from long conversations with our relatives, how resolutely we would avoid them. I confess that I do not see, looking at it merely from a human point of view, what consolation or solace we gain from them, since, as it is neither possible nor permissible for us to participate in their pleasures, we can only share in their vexations, and perhaps shed more tears over their troubles than they do themselves. Therefore I can confidently tell those Religious that if in this way they find any satisfaction for their senses, their souls will suffer for it.

"I can not think without astonishment of the harm done

by talking to one's relatives. It is so great that I doubt whether those who have not experienced it can believe what it is; and I am no less surprised that the perfection of our state, which obliges us to hold aloof from them, should be at so low an ebb in the greater part of our religious Houses that scarcely any trace of it remains. I do not know what we leave when we leave the world, we who profess to have left all for God, if we do not leave the principal thing, that is our relatives.

"Matters in this respect have gone so far that it is now alleged against Religious that they are wanting in virtue if they are not tenderly attached to their relatives; nay, more, an attempt is even made to prove by arguments that it is wrong not to see and talk with them frequently. But, my daughters, what it behooves us in this House to do, after having acquitted ourselves of the duties I spoke of, which the Church requires of us, is to commend our relatives very earnestly to God, and then banish as far as possible from our minds all that concerns them."

St. Francis of Sales was no less aware of the dangers of too great attachment to one's relatives. He writes to one of his nieces (we have not been able to discover whether she was a Religious; but if she was not, the holy bishop's admonition is all the more striking): "Now, then, my dear niece and daughter, you are with your father, whom you look upon as the earthly representative of the Eternal Father; for it is in this character our respect and our service are due to those whom He made instrumental in giving us birth. Hold your soul well in hand, lest it slip from your grasp either to the right or to the left; I mean to say, lest it should get weakened by the affection of those around you, or saddened by contact with the passions and varying moods of those with whom you have to live."

Here we see what were the sentiments, what was the

teaching of the saints. We might multiply quotations, but these are enough. It must be acknowledged that the lessons these great masters give us are agonizing to nature. Yes, more than once at the thought of a father, a mother; at the remembrance of some visit cut short by the obligations of obedience; of a slight, real or imaginary, which we think has been shown to those whom we love dearly and to whom we owe so much; on these and other occasions the poor novice's heart will bleed, his eyes will fill with tears; he will tell himself that in such conduct there is an element of harshness, of cruelty incompatible with the gentle, loving spirit of the Gospel. We do not deny that herein lies one of the most subtle temptations for the young Religious, because apparently on such occasions a duty which he ought to perform is sacrificed, and perfectly legitimate feelings are immolated.

Sacrificed and immolated! This may sound hard, yet remember, you who are God's own child, that it is in this that the chief obligation of your sacred vocation consists. You are a victim, or in the way of becoming one, therefore your life is a continual sacrifice and your spirit of surrender is not to be exercised only in regard to that which is evil, which is forbidden, and which consequently it is absolutely obligatory upon you to sacrifice, but also in regard to what is lawful, as is the possession of this world's goods which you offer as a holocaust to Our Lord by your vow of poverty. The natural affection we have for our parents and they for us is also one of these legitimate possessions, and it is because, although we might enjoy it by remaining in the world, we yet freely make the sacrifice of it to God, that He, the divine Lord and Master of our hearts, accepts our oblation and our holocaust with greater satisfaction.

It will doubtless be said (and this is perhaps the most specious argument of poor human nature driven to an

extremity): It is not so much the sacrifice that I make myself as that which I impose on others which gives me pain. For myself, I am ready to bear anything; but how can I think unmoved of my father, my poor mother, who have not perhaps the same grace to support them as I have, who are unprepared to bear these privations and possibly do not merit by them to any great extent, but who suffer acutely on account of them, since their tenderest, most cherished affections are wounded. That is what troubles me most of all; that is the hardest sacrifice I have to make.

There is certainly some truth in what you say, and you are right in making this observation; but have more confidence in Providence, abandon yourself wholly to Him. Who knows but on the very day when you do not look after your parents as much, God in His goodness will look after them more, and this will be to the advantage of all concerned; your mind will be more at rest, your parents will have more grace bestowed on them, almighty God will be more glorified? Endeavor to commit yourself and those who are dear to you into the hands of that loving and tender Father, and you will see how great is His goodness.

We will conclude this chapter by a quotation from St. Bernard, in which he asserts both the obligation binding upon us to keep aloof from all unruly affection for flesh and blood, and the excellence of the vocation which God in His bounty has conferred on us:

"The true Religious ought to be another Melchisedech, of whom the apostle says that he was without father, without mother, without genealogy. It is not meant that he was actually without these, for he was a man like ourselves; these words are intended to show us that since Holy Scripture, when speaking of him, only regards him in his character of priest, it does not mention his

genealogy, nor even the beginning of his days or the end of his life, in order to teach us that the priests of God, and Religious above all, ought to be as completely detached from the ties of flesh and blood, and as entirely devoted to spiritual things, as if they had come down direct from heaven. Finally that they ought to be counterparts of Melchisedech in heart, that is to say, entirely stripped of everything that can in the least possible degree hinder their progress toward God.

"Wherefore remain in your solitude like a turtle-dove; let there be no connection between you and the world, no intercourse between you and your fellow-men: 'Forget thy people and thy father's house, and the King shall greatly desire thy beauty.'"

CHAPTER XVII.

AN EXHORTATION DELIVERED BY A SUPERIOR TO A NOVICE.

We are now going to assist at the reception of a novice, and listen to the sermon delivered on the occasion of that solemn ceremony, which took place in an Egyptian monastery toward the close of the fifth century. The Superior of the monastery was the celebrated St. Pynuphius, whose humility is so highly extolled in the lives of the Fathers of the desert.

A postulant has, after the usual preliminary trials, been judged worthy of admission to the brotherhood, the time of his formal reception has arrived, and the abbot is about to address an exhortation to him. Listen to his words with great attention, for we know of nothing in the annals of ancient monasticism more admirable than these counsels of perfection. Nor can we doubt their authenticity, since they were recorded by an eye-witness of the ceremony, Cassian, who while on a round of visits to the various monastic institutions in Egypt happened to arrive at the monastery governed by his friend, the Abbot Pynuphius, at the moment of the ceremony in question, and heard him speak as follows:

"To-day, my son, you are admitted into our monastery; but you know how many days you lay prostrate at the door before it was opened to give you ingress. It behooves us now to make you understand why we showed that apparent reluctance, in order that you may walk faithfully

in the way on which you desire to enter the service of Jesus Christ.

"As God promises infinite and endless glory to those who are faithful to Him and follow Him closely, according to the Rule of this House, so He also threatens to visit with awful chastisements those who acquit themselves of the duties of this holy life slothfully, remissly, and whose actions do not correspond to the sanctity of their profession and the high esteem in which their state is held. Scripture, moreover, teaches us that it is better not to take vows than to fail in keeping them when taken; and it also pronounces maledictions upon those who do the work of the Lord deceitfully.

"This then, my son, is the reason why at the outset we have for so long a time refused to listen to your request, not indeed because we were not most willing to afford you, and every one else, all the spiritual assistance in our power; nor because we would not gladly go far to meet those who are desirous to be converted to God; no, it was for fear lest if we admitted you too hastily we might ourselves incur the guilt of having acted rashly in God's sight, if perchance, having been received without full knowledge of the importance of the step you were taking, you were to relax your efforts, or even to lose your vocation by the fatal desertion of the state you had embraced.

"In order to form a correct idea of the religious state, understand first of all that it is a complete renunciation of the world. The man who enters religion announces publicly that he is crucified, that he is dead. Consider yourself therefore to-day as actually dead to the world, to its works, to its aspirations; that, as St. Paul says, you are crucified to the world and the world to you.

"Scrutinize carefully the cross which will henceforth be your portion, since it is no longer you who live, but Christ crucified who lives in you.

"You ought, in fact, throughout the course of your life, to reproduce the state of Jesus Christ when He was fastened to the cross, in order that, according to the expression employed by the prophet, your flesh being pierced with the fear of the Lord as by nails, your will and your desires will remain fixed to the cross, subjugated to the law of mortification, not to the law of concupiscence. In this manner you will comply with the admonition Our Lord gives you when He says: 'He that taketh not up his cross and followeth Me is not worthy of Me.'

"But how, you will ask me, can a man be at one and the selfsame time living and yet crucified? Our cross is the fear of the Lord; and as one who is crucified is no longer at liberty to move his limbs as he chooses, so we must no longer regulate our will, our wishes according to our own pleasure, but according to the law of the Lord. And as he who is fastened to the cross thinks no more of gratifying his passions, has no more anxiety for the morrow, has no longer any desire to amass riches, or any feelings of pride, of anger, of resentment for wrongs done to him either in the present or the past; as he considers himself as dead to all created things though he has not ceased to exist, and in spirit he is already there whither he is tending, i.e., heaven; so in like manner, it is indispensable that we, being nailed to the cross by the fear of the Lord, should be dead not only to vice, but also to a certain extent to the whole world, and that our interior vision, the eye of our soul, should be fixed upon the goal where we are bound to believe that we may be summoned any moment to appear.

"Take good heed therefore never again to pursue after what you have abandoned, and go back, in direct opposition to Our Lord's command, from the field of evangelical labor in which you are at work to take the coat which you laid aside. Do not come down, neglecting His prohibition, from the housetop of perfection to take anything apper-

taining to life in the world which you have renounced, by reviving the low and earthly affections of your earlier days. Forget your relatives and your old attachments, for fear lest, if you are entangled anew in the perplexities and business of the world, it be said of you that, after putting your hand to the plough, you have looked back and are not fit for the kingdom of God.

"To-day, while the fervor of your conversion is yet fresh, you prove by your sincere humility that you tread under foot the pride of the world; see that you do not readmit that pride into your soul by a vain elation of heart when you begin to delight in chanting the psalms and to appreciate the happiness of your profession; lest by building up again that which you demolished you render yourself guilty of prevarication. Nay, rather hold fast the poverty which you are now about to embrace, and which you promise before God and His angels to observe, and see that you persevere in it unto the end.

"You must not even be satisfied to maintain the spirit of humility and patience of which you have given us proof during the ten days which you passed at the gate of the monastery, entreating with tears to be admitted; you must make progress in this virtue and cause it to grow within you; for would it not be a grievous misfortune if, instead of making fresh progress and striving after perfection, you were to relax your efforts and thereby fall below your present stage of attainment? Of a truth it is not he who begins to lead a holy life who shall be saved, but he who shall persevere unto the end.

"That is why I urge this upon you so emphatically: After having entered upon, pledged yourself to the service of God, be steadfast in the way of the Lord, as Holy Scripture says. Moreover, you must prepare yourself not to enjoy repose, not to experience a false security and the delights of life, but rather to encounter trials and suffer-

ings; for only those who have come out of great tribulation can enter into the kingdom of God. Narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leads thereto, and few there are that find it. Learn from this that having been chosen to be one of that small number, you ought not to allow yourself to be led away by the example of the great number, and yield to tepidity and sloth; you ought, on the contrary, to imitate those who form the small number, in order that you may merit to enter with them into the kingdom of God. You know that many are called but few are chosen, and that the flock to whom our heavenly Father gives the inheritance of His celestial kingdom is but a small one. Therefore do not underrate the magnitude of the fault committed by a Religious who, after having embraced a state which aims at the attainment of perfection, instead of exerting himself to acquire it, allows himself to sink into a way of life which is most imperfect. Now these are the steps whereby the perfection after which you are bound to strive may be reached.

"I have already told you that the fear of the Lord is the commencement and the mainstay of our salvation. It is the means whereby those who enter upon the life of perfection are converted to God, cleanse themselves from their vices, and keep up the practice of the virtues they have acquired. This salutary fear, when it pervades the soul, inspires her with a general contempt for all things, it causes her to forget her relatives and to regard the world with holy detestation. This contempt, this divesting one's self of everything, are conducive to humility; and these are the signs by which one perceives that a Religious possesses this true and sincere humility: 1. If he always mortifies his own will; 2. If he does not fail to acquaint his Superior not only with his actions but also with his thoughts; 3. If, far from confiding in his own judgment, he submits implicitly to the decisions of his

Superior, and receives his counsels with alacrity and joy; 4. If he is scrupulous in practising obedience, is gentle and always patient; 5. If he not only is careful not to hurt any one's feelings, but does not trouble himself about the wrong others do to him; 6. If he never ventures to do anything which is not permitted by the Rule and conformable to the example of the monks of old; 7. If he does not think anything below him, and looks upon himself as an unworthy, unprofitable servant, even when he has done all that he was commanded to do; 8. If he considers himself as the last and meanest of all, and allows that he deserves the lowest place, not only with his lips but with all sincerity of heart; 9. If he keeps his tongue in check, and does not raise his voice; 10. If he does not indulge in laughter which savors of levity; by these, or other similar signs one can judge of the humility of the Religious.

"And if he is really, truly humble, his humility will produce in him that divine charity which casteth out fear and which will enable him to perform easily, almost naturally, acts that formerly were accomplished with effort and pain, out of fear of everlasting punishment; whereas, when actuated by this charity, he does them by choice and for the pleasure he experiences in what is good.

"In order to acquire the virtues which I have pointed out to you and to persevere in the practice of them, without growing weary of the struggle involved in this self-discipline, be careful to observe three things which are mentioned in these words of the Royal Psalmist: 'But I as a deaf man heard not, and as a dumb man not opening his mouth. I became as a man that heareth not and that hath no reproofs in his mouth.'

"Thus it is needful for you to conduct yourself in the monastery as if you were deaf, dumb, and blind; you must not turn your eyes upon others, except the one whom

you have taken as your model, and you must shut your eyes to everything which is less perfect or not very edifying, for fear lest the position of those who are less strict and the respect you owe them might lead you little by little to relax your austerity and allow yourself to do things that you formerly condemned.

"If, therefore, you see one of your fellow-Religious who fails in obedience, who is intractable or speaks evil of the others, or does anything different to what the Rule ordains, do not be scandalized and do not be seduced to follow his example; be like a deaf man in regard to such matters; let them pass unnoticed, just as if you had not heard or seen them.

"If one person abuses you and another insults you, remain unmoved; do not let it disturb your equanimity, but listen to what is said like a dumb man who has not the power to reply. Bear in mind David's words: 'I said, I will take heed unto my ways that I sin not with my tongue.'

"There is something more which I must impress upon you yet more emphatically, which you must regard as the culminating point of the virtues I have proposed for you to practice.

"Become a fool in this world that you may be wise, as St. Paul declares that he did. Do not scrutinize, do not ask yourself the why and wherefore of the orders given you. Obey simply with a lively faith. Do not think anything good, useful, or wise except what is commanded you by the law of God or the will of your Superior. Act thus and you will persevere in the discipline of this monastery, resisting all temptations to leave it which the enemy may suggest.

"Furthermore, do not let your patience depend on the virtue of others; I mean you should not content yourself with being patient when no one annoys you, for that does not depend upon yourself; but what is more within

your power, is to let your patience be the result of your humility and forbearance.

"Finally, to epitomize what I have been saying and to enable you to impress it upon your mind, let me indicate in a few words the steps whereby you can, without difficulty, reach the height of perfection. The fear of the Lord is, as Holy Scripture tells us, the beginning of our salvation, the beginning of our wisdom; this fear is productive of salutary compunction. This compunction gives birth to renunciation, that is to say, it leads one to contemn and strip one's self of this world's goods. This voluntary destitution makes us humble, and humility teaches us to mortify our own desires. Mortification has the effect of eradicating, destroying, all vicious tendencies; and in proportion as vice is extirpated virtues grow and flourish. The fruit of virtue is purity of heart, whereby we may attain to the possession of apostolic charity in its full perfection."

This forms the conclusion of the exhortation addressed by the saintly abbot to his novice. It has justly been said that it may serve as a model to any Superior who has to deliver a discourse on the occasion of a clothing or a profession. It also affords an admirable text for the meditation of a novice who is preparing himself for the ceremony.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOME FINAL COUNSELS TO NOVICES.

We will terminate this second part with some advice to novices, which is given in the form of detached sentences. They will form the conclusion and at the same time the completion of what has gone before. They are thirty-one in number, so as to supply matter for examination every day for a month.

1. Frequently ask yourself, as St. Bernard asked himself: "For what purpose have I come here? Why have I left my family, my country, the world?" Your answer will be this: "For the conversion of my life; in order to become humble, gentle, simple, obedient, mortified, willing to make sacrifices; in short, to become a victim offered up to the good pleasure and to the glory of God, in union with Our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. Never, never give way to discouragement! Discouragement turns our steps from the path to heaven, on which we entered by our vocation, and that is no slight misfortune.

3. In your intercourse with the Director of Novices conduct yourself as a child five years old, animated by the spirit of faith, of simplicity, of obedience.

4. If it costs you a great effort to perform some act of humility, of patience, of obedience, be assured that this is a great grace which divine Providence offers you, one

perhaps of those signal graces which enable one to rise with rapid flight to a high degree of perfection.

5. Detach yourself from yourself. Self, the *ego,* is our most formidable adversary.

6. Never say, in extenuation of your faults: I am not a saint; for you are bound to become one if you use aright the spiritual succor afforded you in religion.

7. Never voluntarily waste a single moment of your time.

8. Never seek to excuse yourself; when you are reproved preserve a humble, simple, modest silence.

9. Follow in a spirit of faith the maxim of St. Francis of Sales: "Ask for nothing, refuse nothing."

10. Apply yourself vigorously, energetically to conquer your ruling passion.

11. Be equally determined to eradicate your faults of character.

12. Cultivate great delicacy of conscience and practise absolute obedience to your confessor.

13. Never think otherwise than kindly of every one of your fellow-Religious, and you will win rich blessings from the Hearts of Jesus and of Mary.

14. Place yourself with unfeigned humility at the feet of every one of your Brethren. You have every reason to love that posture and to keep it.

15. Take great pains to become a prayerful soul by use of the means wherewith the religious life furnishes you; spiritual readings, direction, habits of regularity, practices of mortification.

16. Do not forget that silence well kept is a source of happiness and of fervor.

17. Cherish a love for Community life and hold in abhorrence exemptions, privileges, and dispenses.

18. Everything about a Religious ought to be in keeping with his state; his deportment, his demeanor, his gestures,

the tone of his voice, his custody of the eyes, his sorrows, and his joys.

19. The religious life, the novitiate, are henceforth your father, mother, family, your relatives and your home.

20. Love the seclusion of the novitiate as being your protection, your safeguard, and take delight in it.

21. Conceive a filial affection for your Congregation and take a loving interest in all that concerns it; its aim, its spirit, its works, its Rule and Constitutions, its history, the customs, the religious habit peculiar to it.

22. Be faithful to the least observances, to the most trifling practices of the novitiate, and attach great weight to the slightest counsels given you.

23. Do not allow yourself to make comparisons between your Congregation and others that holy Church has approved. Hold them all in the greatest respect, and reject any depreciatory thought concerning them as displeasing in God's sight.

24. Compose an act of oblation for yourself in your character of a victim, since you are supposed to have made one on the day of your clothing, and renew it frequently.

25. Approach the tribunal of penance with the spirit of faith, and cultivate this spirit in all your intercourse with the director of your conscience.

26. Live in unbroken union with Our Lord as a victim in the adorable Sacrament of the Altar.

27. Endeavor in all you do to be actuated by the love of God.

28. Look to Mary, the sweet Queen of our hearts, with childlike confidence and affection. She is the joy and delight of the novitiate, and she gives grace and fervor to persevere to all who truly love her.

29. Cherish a loving devotion for St. Joseph, for the holy Patrons of your Congregation, and for the holy angels.

30. Give thanks to God every day for the favor He has bestowed on you in making you a child of our Holy Father the Pope and a member of holy Church, and serve them both with joyful and loving homage.

31. In all things look to God only, God only! Seek to fulfil His holy will, His good pleasure, seek His interests, His glory alone. All the light, the strength, all the peace and consolation which is our portion in this our exile, all the hope of our future country is contained in these two words: God alone! *Dieu seul!*

Part III.

The Religious Vows.

CHAPTER I.

THE DAY OF SOLEMN PROFESSION. WHAT A VOW REALLY IS.

What a happy day the day of his profession is for the novice! The exercises of the novitiate have been his preparation for it, and the preparation was a long one. When the term of his probation approached its end, the Community were assembled, and after earnest prayer and mature deliberation they gave their votes. Then the ecclesiastical authority intervened, a canonical examination took place, and both the votes and the examination were in the novice's favor. This was indeed welcome news for him, when it was told him one day, as it was to the virgins in the Gospel: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh," He is coming to accomplish the union, to consummate the sacrifice. What graces are in store for the chosen child of God, what supreme joy! Up to that time he was only a victim offered to God. The period of his noviceship was the period of his mystic oblation of himself. Now he is to become a whole burnt-offering in God's sight; and in his rapturous gratitude and love, he exclaims with the Psalmist: "I will go in to the altar of God, to God who

giveth joy to my youth. I will enter in and take up my abode in His holy house, and the holocaust I shall offer shall be none other than myself. For the sparrow hath found herself a house, and the turtle a nest for herself; but as for me, Thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God, are my dwelling-place; and there before Thy face and for the sake of Thy love I shall abide forever that I may sacrifice myself, that I may be a victim immolated for Thy good pleasure, consumed by the flame of charity for Thy greater glory."

At length the day of profession arrives, and all the Community hold high festival; for it is a day sacred not only for the novice, but for all his fellow-Religious. When they witness the touching spectacle of the complete self-surrender of the youthful monk, all the members of the Community renew with fresh fervor the vows they once took. They are reminded that they are victims, and they desire to make their sacrifice more perfect than ever. A profession in a religious House is a source of great blessings to all the inmates.

In the first part of this work we demonstrated at some length that at his profession the Religious becomes a perfect and entire holocaust, and there is no need to enlarge further on that point. We are now, whilst confining our attention principally to the practical side of the solemn act accomplished by the Religious when he consecrates himself irrevocably to his God, about to consider the vows which constitute the essence of the religious life. It is by them that the soul is fixed in the state of a burnt-offering, and it is to them that we must devote the most careful study, making ourselves well acquainted with what a vow really is, with the distinction between the vows of religion and the virtues which are the end and fulfilment of those vows, with the obligations laid upon us by those vows and by the virtues corresponding to them, subjects which one and all

are of the highest moment, and to which the newly professed must give the closest attention.

For the matter of that, these matters are nothing new to him. The principal object of the novitiate is, as we have said previously, to afford the Religious the opportunity of acquainting himself with the obligations involved in the religious profession, and consequently what we are now about to say ought to be a subject of special study on the part of the novice. But since the act of profession consists in taking the vows, it follows naturally that as we have spoken of the profession, we should now treat of this serious and important act.

First of all, what is a vow from a general point of view? All theologians tell us that a vow is a deliberate promise made to God of something more virtuous.

The latter part of this definition is somewhat obscure, but in the following explanations it will be elucidated, as well as the other terms of the definition, sufficiently for our present purpose.

1. A vow is "a promise." It is not a question here of a resolution merely, how generous and fervent soever. A resolution, of whatever nature it may be, never lays the soul under a fresh obligation. If it is kept, so much the more virtue and merit for the soul; if it is not kept, this neglect may be an imperfection, but it is in nowise a sin. A vow, on the contrary, is the initial act of a real engagement into which one enters, of a definite obligation of which one must acquit one's self under pain of sin either mortal or venial.

2. It is a "deliberate" promise. This word indicates that if a vow is to be real and binding, it is essential that there should be exact knowledge of what is promised, full consent and entire liberty on the part of the individual who takes it.

This is partly the reason why the novitiate was estab-

lished by the Church and by founders of Orders in all religious Institutes. The novice ought to be well aware of the precise nature and extent of the vows which he will take on the day of his profession; and the Church requires that there should be such complete liberty in regard to taking those vows, that should the Religious only take them under compulsion, or from motives of human respect, they are null and valueless.

3. A deliberate promise "made to God." A vow is, in fact, an act of supreme worship, the worship due to God alone. Therefore no vow can be made directly to the Blessed Virgin or to one of the saints, although it may be made in their honor or to obtain their favor. It is with God directly that the engagement is entered into, and we know by the proceedings of the Church that a vow is a contract that God never fails to ratify, because we are always bound to fulfil it.

Hence it will be seen that in a question of dispensing from vows, especially religious vows, there must be solid and weighty reasons. The power of dispensing from them belongs only to ecclesiastical authorities, and in the exercise of their prerogative they must always safeguard the sacred and divine rights of the Most High. Thus any individual, most of all a Religious, who should allege fictitious reasons to obtain release from some vow, would not only be guilty of a grave fault of duplicity, but would entirely fail in attaining his end, for the dispensation would be void and nugatory.

Nevertheless there might be legitimate motives for desiring a dispensation, and if after they have been candidly disclosed to those who stand toward us in the place of God, if the dispensation is granted, it may be accepted in peace, with a quiet conscience. The same may be said in regard to the annulling and commuting of a vow.[1]

[1] The annulling of a vow is the act whereby a lawful Superior

One great advantage resulting from making a vow is that the accomplishment of what has been promised thereby becomes a religious act.

In order to understand this aright, one must be aware that the merit of an act depends in part on the virtue whence it proceeds. Thus an act of charity is more perfect and more meritorious in itself than an act of penance, because charity is a more perfect virtue than penitence. Now after the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, there is none more perfect than the virtue of religion, by which we pay to God the worship and the homage due to Him. If therefore the act that we pledged ourselves by vow to perform is thereby elevated to the dignity of an act of religion, the added excellence accruing from the vow is apparent. For instance, I refrain from reading a book which is entertaining but in no wise useful; this is an act of mortification on my part; but if I make a vow not to read it, the accomplishment of that vow becomes an act of the virtue of religion. In short, the merit is not only augmented, but doubled; for, in exalting my act to the dignity of a religious act, it does not cease to be a work of mortification which is in itself meritorious.

4. A promise made to God of something more virtuous; that is to say, of something which it is more virtuous to do than to omit. Since the object of a vow is to render to God special worship, this end would not be attained if the matter of the vow were not something which it was better and more perfect to do than to leave undone. The following explanations and examples will serve to throw additional light on what has been somewhat obscurely expressed.

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declares some vow made by his inferior to be null, because it was one which that individual was not qualified to make. The Superior commutes a vow when in the place of what has been promised he substitutes another act which is equivalent to it.

The matter of the vow or the thing promised may be either an obligatory act, or one which is only of counsel, or even an act of quite an indifferent character; take, for instance, to hear Mass on Sundays and holydays, which is an obligatory act; to turn the left cheek to one who has struck us on the right, which is only of counsel; and to read, study, go on a journey, all of which are acts indifferent in themselves, and only rendered good by the intention one has, the end one proposes to one's self in performing them. Thus we may read a book for the purpose of gaining knowledge of the duties of our state, or may undertake a journey for the sake of reconciling ourselves with an enemy, etc.

In the first case the vow is the promise to perform a more virtuous action because, in fact, the thing commanded (to assist at holy Mass) acquires additional excellence in virtue of the vow, and thereby becomes more pleasing to God. By fulfilling the command after having made the vow we perform a better action than if we had not made the vow.

In regard to an act which is only of counsel, the vow adds a greater value to what is already good in itself, and thus renders the act a better one. If we perform the act without previously making a vow, we do a good work; but if we choose to make it the matter of a vow, we voluntarily lay ourselves under an obligation by which it is better to be bound than to retain our liberty of action.

Finally, in the case of a vow concerning some act of an indifferent nature, as, for example, to take a journey, besides the intention which gives the deed value (supposing it to be a journey of charity or of devotion) the vow imparts to it a special excellency. What was voluntary becomes obligatory; the act acquires the value of a religious act over and above its own intrinsic value. Thus the act one has pledged one's self by vow to perform be-

comes a better and a higher one, and more pleasing in God's sight than if the vow had not been taken.

This fact is one of the chief sources of encouragement and consolation to the Religious; for while ordinary Christians only practise the virtue of religion when they perform acts directly appertaining to it, i.e., acts of divine worship, the Religious may be said in a certain sense to practise it continually; and his whole life, provided he lives up to his high calling, thus becomes a perpetual holocaust, one in which every act without exception is one of homage to almighty God.

Such is the exact idea which we ought to form of the vow in general.

It may be well to add that if a private individual makes a vow, it lays him under no obligations but those of his own choice. It may be of a temporary or permanent nature; binding under pain of mortal or venial sin; its accomplishment may be fixed for a certain date, or to take place under certain circumstances; it may be conditional or absolute. In short, it depends wholly and solely on the will of the person who makes it.

This only holds good in regard to *private* vows. With the vows taken in religious Communities it is otherwise. One is free either to take or not to take them; in the latter case the novice is not professed, but leaves the Order; if, however, he takes the vows, it is not in his power either to extend or restrict their obligations. He can only take them conformably to the Rule, or else they will be valueless in God's sight.

We shall now consider the vows of religion more in detail.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE RELIGIOUS VOWS.

By the religious vows is meant the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, taken in an Institute approved by the Holy See.

These three vows form the essence of the religious life. The religious life has been defined as: "A permanent and fixed manner of life, approved by the Church, in which the faithful pledge themselves to strive after perfection by means of the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, taken in accordance with the Rule of the Order."

1. It is said to be a fixed and permanent manner of life approved by the Church. Without the approbation of the highest ecclesiastical authority, what warranty would the faithful possess for the excellence of the most perfect Rules of an Order to all appearance most fervent? The Church can not be deceived in her estimate of the end proposed by a Congregation, and the means whereby they purpose to attain that end.

2. Furthermore, it is a life "in which the faithful pledge themselves to strive after perfection." This striving after perfection is the essence of the religious life, and every Religious is under a solemn engagement to make this tending toward perfection the permanent attitude of his soul.

3. "By means of the vows." This is an indispensable

necessary condition. Without the vows the monk or nun might aspire after perfection, as indeed many persons do who live in the world. But the latter are at liberty to relinquish the pursuit of perfection and confine themselves to keeping the commandments; whereas the Religious is fixed for the remainder of his life in this condition of striving after perfection, and he can not desist from it under pain of mortal sin. Now it is the religious vows which bind him to this state of life.

4. "Vows taken in accordance with the Rule of the Order." It is, in fact, from the Rule and Constitutions that the particular extent given to the vows in each several Order is learned as well as the exact manner of practising them.

After the priesthood, there is nothing more holy, more sublime than the religious life. It is of divine institution. Our Lord Himself was its Founder, and it was followed in the earliest ages of Christianity.

Memorials of great antiquity leave no doubt on this point. St. Martha, when driven out of Palestine with St. Lazarus and St. Mary Magdalen, landed in the south of Gaul, and founded a convent there for devout women. Her sister, St. Magdalen, is said to have embraced the religious life in the East. St. Ignatius the Martyr wrote to the Philippians thus: "I salute the Association of Virgins and the Congregation of Widows;" and elsewhere he bids the faithful of Tarsus to respect virgins who are consecrated to God, and to look upon widows as the altars of the Most High. And in his epistle to the people of Antioch he says: "Let the virgins remember to whom they have been consecrated."

Unquestionably religious Communities both of men and women existed long before the time of St. Anthony and St. Pachomius, who are termed the Fathers of the monastic life. It is evident that from the period when the deserts

were peopled by so many holy hermits, the religious life was held in high esteem, and the history of monasticism both in the East and in the West abounds in marvels.

However, all vows were simple vows until the twelfth century, when, at the second Lateran Council, Pope Innocent II. gave them the greater dignity of solemn vows. We shall now show what was the effect of this act of supreme authority on the part of the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

Religious vows are either simple vows or solemn vows. They are in no wise different as to substance, that is to say, whatever vows the Religious takes, whether they be simple or solemn, they are equally strict as regards practice; the same poverty, the same chastity, the same obedience are required by both. The distinction between them consists in this: if the Religious who has taken the solemn vows should perform any act contrary to his vow, that act would be invalid; whereas in the case of a Religious who had taken simple vows, the same act, although illicit, would yet be valid.

But if it is true that solemn vows do not bind the monk or nun to a stricter observance of poverty, chastity, and obedience, still it can not be denied that they admit him to a state of greater perfection, because they are a greater restraint upon his liberty, and consequently they form a more absolute consecration to God. Moreover, solemn profession, and that alone, is said to be a second baptism, and to be comparable to martyrdom.

The religious Institutes which take solemn vows are canonically called religious Orders; those that only take simple vows are termed religious Congregations. But even in some Orders strictly so called the Religious only take simple vows; this is a matter determined by the Constitutions. The Church also sometimes gives to a simple vow the virtue and force of a solemn vow. In

France, after the Revolution of 1793, the Church, for wise reasons, ordered that no religious women, whether they belonged to an old Order or to a modern Congregation, should take any but simple vows.

Solemn vows can not be otherwise than perpetual; this is an absolutely indispensable condition. Simple vows may either be perpetual or only for a limited period. These differences originate in the individual views of each Founder of a religious Congregation, which are always well grounded and deserving of respect, especially if the Rule and Constitutions are approved by the ecclesiastical authorities. There are even Communities some members of which take perpetual, others temporary, vows; others again whose members only take one or two of the three vows, e.g., that of obedience.

But whatever the period may be for the duration of the vows, whether they are lifelong, or only for one year, it must be remembered that solemn vows and simple vows, perpetual vows and temporary vows, are equally binding upon the Religious, equally strict in regard to the personal practice of the vow, for the time being; that is to say, the Religious who takes the vows for one year only must consider himself bound to practise poverty, obedience, and chastity during that year, no less strictly than the Religious who has pledged himself by solemn vow to observe them all his life long.

It will therefore be unnecessary again to speak of the distinction between solemn and simple vows. What we have to say in the following pages will be for all Religious in general.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE VOW OF POVERTY.

The vow of poverty is the sacrifice which the Religious makes to God of his temporal possessions, in such a manner as to deprive himself. to the extent prescribed by his Rule, of the right to possess anything.

The vow of poverty is a real sacrifice, nay more, it is a holocaust, that is, a complete and entire sacrifice, according to the words of Pope St. Gregory the Great, whom St. Thomas quotes when speaking of religious poverty: "Those who assist the poor by bestowing on them a portion of what they possess, offer an oblation by this good work, because they sacrifice to God a part of their property, whilst they retain the other part for themselves. But those who reserve nothing at all offer a holocaust, which is more than an ordinary sacrifice."

The Constitutions of every Order or Congregation determine, in a practical and decisive manner, the matter and the extent of the spiritual sacrifice which the Religious has to make, the rights which he relinquishes and those which he retains; consequently it would be superfluous and useless for us to enter into such details. It is enough to state the obligations binding upon every Religious, whatever the Institute to which he belongs; and to accomplish this we have only to mention the various acts which constitute a violation of the vow. This is, after all, what it most concerns the Religious to know, and what most calls for his attention. For the vow of poverty has

this peculiarity, that, unlike the other vows of chastity and obedience, virtues to the practice of which we have been accustomed since our childhood, thanks to our Christian education, poverty is something new to us, and we have yet to be trained to the practice of it, since our natural inclination leads us constantly to violate the vow, because almost all the acts which it prohibits are good and lawful out of the pale of the vow.

We must observe beforehand that permission properly obtained from a Superior or reasonably taken for granted, as well as the existence of an established custom, justifies the transgressions of the law in the instances we are about to give.

The vow of poverty may be violated in two ways: 1. By appropriating to one's self some article without permission. 2. By giving that article to another person.

The first manner of breaking the vow includes the following cases:

1. Taking an article of any kind for one's self, whether that article belongs to the Community or to an externe; whether it be something found by chance, or one of which the owner is known; whether the individual who takes possession of it intends to keep it as his own or simply to make use of it; finally, whether he takes it for himself or for another.

Every transgression of the seventh commandment, be it observed, is doubly sinful in a Religious, because in committing it he renders himself guilty of a sin against the virtue of justice by violating the seventh commandment, and of a sin against the virtue of religion by breaking his vow of poverty, and of both he ought to accuse himself in confession.

In the second place let us observe that a theft committed in a religious House assumes the character of sacrilege.

2. Retaining in one's own hands, or in the keeping of some one else, anything which one has been permitted to have, but which one keeps with a love of possession, in a spirit of ownership; a fault into which a Religious may fall, if, for instance, he takes pains to hide something which he thinks his Superior is likely to take from him.[1]

3. Keeping anything beyond the time fixed by the Superior, and, supposing that permission to retain it longer had been taken for granted, wilfully to neglect to mention that fact, and obtain a renewal of the permission to keep or use the article in question.

4. Accepting anything whatsoever either from a member of the Community or an externe, whether with a view to permanent possession or temporary use. It is not forbidden to accept a present given to us for the Community, if in taking it we have the intention of handing it over to the proper person. In fact it would be wrong to refuse something which was offered us to be given to the Superior, unless ordinary prudence dictated the refusal.

5. Accepting a gift of any description from relatives, friends, or any other persons. One maxim which forms part of canon law is this: All that the monk acquires is acquired for the monastery. It is, however, not necessary for the Religious to inform the donor of the gift that he is forbidden to accept it for himself. It is enough if he has the intention of handing everything over to his Superior.

6. Keeping to one's self a part or the whole of the price of work he has done, or the fees for ministerial duty which he has performed.

7. Buying anything, even if it be for the Community.

8. Borrowing either from a member of the Community

[1] St. Francis of Sales, writing to a Community where the vow of poverty was observed with great laxity, reminds them of the old proverb: *The Religious who owns a cent is not worth a cent.*

or from a stranger. In the first case the fault would be much less grave.

9. Spending on one's self what has been saved, principally money, as, for instance, on a journey one may have economized a part of the sum given one to defray the expenses incurred. All that is over ought to be returned to the Superior.

Such are the ways by which the vow of poverty may be broken in the first manner.

The second manner of transgressing the vow of poverty. This is done by bestowing anything on another person.

1. It is forbidden to give anything of any description either to a member of the Community or to a secular. As the Religious possesses nothing of his own, to give anything away implies a theft from the Community, which on the one hand is of the nature of sacrilege, and on the other obliges him to make restitution.

However, supposing that the Superior has given certain things to the Religious, as, for instance, provisions for his journey, which he is not supposed to take back to the monastery and which are therefore absolutely his own, he would be at liberty to give a portion to a poor man as alms, or to his fellow-travelers if occasion arose, out of feelings of good-breeding and Christian politeness.

2. The Religious must not accept anything on behalf of a third person not expressly named by the giver. For instance supposing a sum of money was given him for the relief of the poor in general without any special person or persons being named, he ought not to take it, because the appropriation of it to certain individuals on his own authority would be an act of ownership. But it would not be an act of ownership, and consequently no sin against poverty, to accept an alms for some definite person or persons who were in want, for a religious House, or some

particular charitable work. In that case he would only be intrusted with a commission, and discretion alone would govern his conduct.

3. The Religious must not sell anything, and if he should be charged with the sale of anything, such as drugs in the dispensary of a hospital, he must not lessen or add to the fixed price at his own judgment.

4. He must not exchange one thing for another. He is more blameworthy if this transaction takes place with an externe.

5. Lending anything is forbidden. There is a great difference between lending to a member of the Community or to an outsider.

6. The Religious must not remit a debt on his own authority. For instance, if he is in receipt of an allowance from his parents, he has no right to authorize its discontinuance.

7. If anything given him for his own use, or for which his office renders him responsible, is lost, either by himself or through his fault, it is a sin against poverty. A procurator, minister, cook, or the brother who is in charge of the linen may easily fall into this fault.

8. The same may be said concerning spoiling anything, or allowing it to be spoiled. On this point Fr. Gautrelet remarks very sensibly: "It often happens that less care is taken of things in a religious House than in the world. This ought not to be so; for in the world no one else is the worse for a man's carelessness, because the things are his own, whereas in religion he only has the use of them. Besides, do not the religious state and the vows one has taken constitute an obligation to practise the virtue of poverty more perfectly than in the world? The man who lets his clothes wear out for want of mending, or spoils them by standing too near the fire in winter, would be less heedless if the expense of purchasing new ones fell upon him."

9. No article belonging to a house one is leaving must be taken to another house of the Order, unless it be something which is usually provided for the personal, daily use of the Religious.

10. Finally, he must not put anything to a different use to that prescribed by the Superior. This may occur when traveling, etc.

Such are the various acts implying possession which are prohibited to every Religious. It will easily be perceived that the vow of poverty imposes on him incessant sacrifices; in fact, the fervent Religious who is careful to fulfil punctually the promise he made to God will find himself continually confronted by one or other of the cases we have enumerated, which hamper his independence and his liberty, and compel him constantly to sacrifice his wishes, however lawful, in regard to his parents, to the poor, etc. How salutary is this restraint, how useful this self-immolation! By this means the life of the Religious becomes a perpetual holocaust, and this is the source of innumerable graces for him. For as it is said of the divine Master that "being rich He became poor for your sakes, that through His poverty you might be rich" (II. Cor. viii. 9), the Religious who participates in an eminent degree in this state of poverty chosen by the adorable Victim will receive a far larger share of His spiritual riches than that bestowed upon ordinary Christians. Words can not express the wondrous benefits which his vow purchases for him, or the divine favors lavished upon him, in return for the sacrifice he makes of the evanescent pleasures which the worldling derives from the possession of wealth.

This will appear more strikingly in the following chapters, in which the end and object of the vow of poverty will be set forth.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE VIRTUE OF POVERTY.

The acquisition of the virtue of poverty is the object for which the vow of poverty is taken. It is in order to attain to the possession of that precious treasure that the Religious strips himself of all that he possesses by the vow of poverty. The practice of this virtue is therefore something more perfect than the mere observance of the vow. The direct object of the latter is to divest one of all exterior and temporal goods in a greater or less degree. The virtue goes further: it thrusts the sacrificial knife into the heart, by prohibiting all undue love of temporal goods. It is the virtue which Our Lord extolled when He said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. v. 3).

A virtue is not merely more perfect than a vow; it also has a wider range, for one may offend against the virtue without violating the vow, but the vow can not be violated without offending against the virtue and rendering it less perfect.

In like manner some acts of the virtue are obligatory and others are of counsel. In some respects it has no limits; it may attain an heroic degree and become a habit of really sublime perfection. This we shall see in the next chapter. A vow, on the contrary, is, as a matter of course, limited, and only embraces what is of obligation; it reaches perfection not in itself but in the virtue which it is its object to produce.

However, it must be said that if the vow is a means of

attaining the virtue which is its aim, the virtue, in its turn, is a means of putting the vow into practice. Interior detachment from all affection for temporal goods is of no small service in ensuring the fulfilment of the promise made to God consisting in the relinquishment of all rights of possession; and any shortcoming in the practice of the virtue endangers the observance of the vow, since if we display carelessness in regard to the end itself, it shows that we can not care much for the means of obtaining that end.

The virtue of poverty is to a certain extent binding on every Christian. An inordinate love of riches, excessive attachment to worldly possessions, immoderate fear of losing them, would be sinful even in a secular. The obligation binding on the Religious is of a far stricter character. Many things that are sinful for him are not even reprehensible in persons living in the world.

It may be useful to mention the cases in question, which are five in number, for the edification of those who are consecrated to God.

1. It would be a sin against the virtue of poverty for the Religious voluntarily to regret the loss of the property which was sacrificed to God by the vow of poverty, and to indulge sadness on experiencing the want of some article or other the use of which she enjoyed in the world.

It must be remarked that if this frame of mind went so far as to engender a definite wish to possess or to have the use of some article, or to do anything involving a sense of ownership, such as lending or borrowing without asking permission from the Superior, that wish, although implicit, being invested with the malignity of an explicit act, would be at the same time an offence against the vow and against the virtue of poverty. Consequently it would be necessary to specify, in confession, the existence not only of a fruitless regret, but of a definite desire.

2. It is a sin against poverty for the Religious to keep anything which he does not need, even if permission to do so has been granted to him; for though the permission exculpates him from a violation of the vow, the offence against the virtue remains. The monk or nun ought to be content with what is necessary. To try to obtain and keep superfluities is clearly a departure from the spirit of the vow and of the religious profession.

Here, however, we must call to mind what Fr. Gautrelet says on this subject: "When in discussing this point we speak of what is *necessary*, we must not be supposed to mean only what is absolutely and rigorously necessary. Under this term is included whatever is befitting to the religious state, and the measure of suitability must depend upon the nature, the Rules, the work of the Order, the degree of poverty professed in that Order, the class, the needs, the age, the position of different individuals. An aged Religious, an invalid, or a Superior, will require many things which the other Religious can well do without; a Benedictine monk, for instance, may, without prejudice to the virtue of poverty, own many things which a Franciscan is forbidden to possess."

3. It is a sin against the virtue of poverty to be unduly attached to anything, however insignificant. It is not the importance of the object that makes the sin, but the excessive attachment entertained for it. This irregularity may be detected by the pleasure experienced in making use of the article in question, by the dread of losing it, or the vexation felt at the idea of being deprived of it.

4. It is an offence against this virtue to allow the goods of the Community to be lost or spoiled, even if one has not the charge of them. If they were entrusted to our care, it would constitute a direct violation of the vow.[1]

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[1] An illustration will serve to make our meaning more clear. A

5. Finally, wasting one's time is an offence against poverty, because the loss of time is a direct wrong done to the Community. The Religious will do well to examine his conscience now and again in regard to interior attachments to things of which the possession and the use are pleasurable to him. As soon as he perceives an attachment of this description, let him beg his Superior to take away what is the source of temptation to him, and an occasion of laxity. But more often than not the Religious, unless he is very fervent, does not perceive this failing. We find the following apt comparison in the works of spiritual writers: Just as we never think about our teeth being tightly fixed in our mouth, until one of them has to be extracted, so some things which we use are, as it were, riveted to our heart, and we only discover this when they are taken from us, taken too, perhaps, in no very considerate manner.

But if the individual Religious ought to avoid with the utmost care whatever is contrary to holy poverty, the Communities themselves, that is to say, those who govern them, ought to exercise extreme vigilance to avert the dangers attending love of comfort, luxury, wealth. This is a most important point; we will not venture to speak of it ourselves, but will invoke a higher and holier authority. Let us listen to the Venerable Mère Emilie de Rodat, an exemplary nun and a woman of practical good sense and excellent judgment. As her writings may not be within the reach of all, we will enrich our pages

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Religious notices that an open window, being unfastened and swaying to and fro in the wind, is liable to be broken. He passes on without paying further heed to it, and takes no steps to prevent the damage which he foresees to be imminent. This is a sin against poverty; since he is a member of the Community he ought to espouse its interests, and not expose the Community, by his indifference, to a loss which might have been avoided.

with a few extracts from them bearing on our present subject.

In a spiritual Conference given to the Sisters, she says: "Our Father Superior (M. l'Abbé Marty), as you know, has frequently expressed the wish that Our Lord would preserve our Congregation from the misfortune of becoming rich. How truly my heart echoes that wish, and how ardently I hope that we may never have ample funds at our disposal! No, my Sisters, wealth is not to be desired for religious Communities; on the contrary, it is to be dreaded. St. Paul says: For . . . having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content (I. Tim. vi. 8). Let this ever be our motto. Riches are an initial cause of relaxation of discipline in religious Communities, and one can readily understand why; as long as an Institute is poor, the love of work prevails there, and it excludes a thousand temptations which idleness and ease are apt to engender. With easy circumstances, under one pretext or other, things are gradually made more comfortable; one trifling improvement is thought to be required for the well-being of the Community; this leads to another, and then another, thus little by little a certain luxuriousness creeps in, even in providing for the table, and how sad are the consequences in regard to order and discipline! On the other hand, if a Community has only what is absolutely necessary, poverty is maintained in the arrangements of the house and furniture, the clothes, and food of the Religious; and they, keeping more closely to the spirit of poverty, are more humble, more mortified. That is to some extent a matter of necessity, you will perhaps say. For some it may possibly be so, but if so, it is a happy necessity; and believe me, we can not do better than pray almighty God never to remove this necessity from us.

"At the period of the Revolution of 1793 some religious

Houses were in a sad state, the Rules were relaxed, and more than one instance of scandal occurred at that unhappy time. How came this to pass, my dear Sisters? From the wealth those Communities possessed; having no need to work for their maintenance, the members of those Communities had acquired habits of indolence and dissipation, they neglected the duties of their state, they fared well, even sumptuously, and the life they led was in no wise worthy of their vocation. Consequently the chastisements of Heaven fell upon them. There is no fear that we should go to such lengths, I hear you say. Ah, my Sisters, I am not so sure of what we might not do, if we were so unfortunate as to become rich; I can not say that we should not grow lax in the practice of holy poverty. A change such as I speak of does not come all at once; laxity creeps in by degrees, insensibly. The Religious begin by indulging the wish to have their habits made of less coarse material; some mitigation of the Rule in this respect is asked for; their clothes, their shoes are made rather better. The coarse linen which was in use at first is, they say, unsuitable for weak and delicate constitutions; the furniture is said to be superannuated, of a ridiculous shape, and uncomfortable; that it really costs more constantly to renew the whitewash on the walls than to have them simply papered, and so on; thus first for one reason, then for another, some trifling modification is suggested, those who wish to introduce them never reflecting that one change always calls for another, and that if water slowly filters into a wall drop by drop, the wall at last crumbles and falls. The trifling wants one creates for one's self mount up almost imperceptibly, slowly but surely. Many things which at the outset could easily be dispensed with, later on become necessary, indispensable, so that the unfortunate Superior finds herself confronted by the unpleasant alternative of either yielding to the

demands of her subjects, or giving rise to discontent, complaining, murmuring. Going on at this rate, what would one come to? Alas, it comes to this: that nuns nowadays do not deserve the name, so different are they to their predecessors or even to what they formerly were."

Mère Emilie, with a sagacity which nothing escapes, proceeds to expound to the Sisters, by entering more into detail, how laxity in regard to poverty gradually gains ground, and ends by entering into everything.

"One Sister will say that if the habit she is wearing is too shabby, too much patched, if her shoes, her girdle, her veil are too much rubbed and worn, her pupils will remark upon it; or if she is not cloistered, that it is disrespectful toward the people living in the world with whom her duties bring her into contact to enter their presence in so disreputable a condition; therefore she begs the Sister in charge of the wardrobe to give her something better; then others who are, or consider themselves to be, in similar circumstances, express the same wish, and if that wish is not complied with they complain that preference is shown to some, and this opens the door to another abuse. It is the same with many other matters which appear trivial, but which, in my opinion, are far from being unimportant, by reason of the inevitable consequence that must ensue from them.

"The Sisters who are set over any department ought to be on their guard in this respect, since any weakness on their part might lead to no slight relaxation of discipline. If, for instance, the Sister in charge of the wardrobe, thinking that she ought to show greater consideration to the Superior, her Assistant, or the senior Sisters, makes their habits a better shape, or uses finer material for them, if she gives them a larger or lighter veil, overlooking the fact that it behooves the Superior and the senior Sisters to set an example of strict observance to the others, who can

tell to what fatal results her well-meant weakness may lead?

"If the Sister who provides for the House, tempted by having a bargain offered her, should purchase serge or linen of a finer make than what is prescribed by the Rule, she would be introducing a change which might in time cause no little laxity. As for me, I am so thoroughly convinced of the importance of keeping strictly to the Rule in everything, of not admitting the slightest innovation, that I would rather pay double the amount for a coarse, rough material such as the Rule prescribes, than buy a smooth and fine one at half the price. That would indeed be false, nay, fatal economy which should introduce abuses and laxity amongst us. May God ever preserve us from it! Even in purchasing the small articles we have in daily use, such as a knife, scissors, penholder, etc., we must choose what is most in accordance with holy poverty, remembering that it is by almost imperceptible steps that we stray from that safe path, and thus bring about, or at least prepare the way for, the decadence of the Community."

Her solicitude for the observance of holy poverty went so far as to lead her to enjoin upon the Sisters to put out the lights as soon as they were not needed any longer; not to waste any, even the least portion, of the aliments served to them; nor to omit to pick up any little things which had been dropped and put them away carefully in a place assigned for their reception. In this respect she set the example of such minute attention to trifling matters that it might be thought almost exaggerated, unless regarded in the light of the supernatural spirit of faith that guided all her actions.

She could not bear to have more provisions than were wanted in a convent, and appeared as eager to get rid of what was superfluous as others might have been to secure

it, for human prudence was abhorrent to her, under whatever pretext it was disguised. On one occasion, far from being cast down by the accidental circumstances which disappointed the financial hopes and calculations of the Sister who acted as minister, even in matters where human prudence did not come into play, she spoke jestingly of them, and gave thanks to God equally for failure as for success.

The reader will pardon us for having transcribed at some length the admirable teaching of this excellent Religious, in which the doctrine of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of wisdom, is clearly discernible.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE DIFFERENT DEGREES OF PERFECTION IN THE VIRTUE OF POVERTY. THE FIRST DEGREE.

Faithful observance of the vow of poverty and the strict practice of it constitute a twofold victory of the victim's spirit of self-surrender over our human nature, so perversely inclined to the possession, the love of earthly things. But there is yet another victory of a far more glorious character which that sublime spirit is wont to win. This we shall now proceed to contemplate and admire in the perfect practice of the grand virtue now under consideration.

We have already been told by Pope St. Gregory that the religious vow of poverty is a real holocaust. Now the holocaust, that is, the sacrifice in which the victim is wholly consumed by fire, consisted, under the Old Law, of a series of ceremonies. First of all there was the immolation of the victim, then the act of flaying it, finally the burning or consuming of the victim. In the holocaust offered by the Religious, the vow of poverty is the sacrificial blade wherewith the victim is slain, but the absolute and entire stripping of one's self which forms the second act consists in the practice of the vow in all its perfection, or rather of the virtue which prompts that practice. For just as, after the victim had been flayed, there was nothing for it but to be committed to the flames, so the soul which

is truly and completely divested of all that savors of earth will be forthwith consumed in the fire of divine charity.

Such is the condition imposed on the Religious; such is the real spirit of his holy profession. He takes the vows and he desires to attain to the highest point of perfection in the virtue corresponding to the vow he has taken. This truth St. Gregory the Great seems to imply when he reminds us of the circumstances under which the holocaust was offered: We flay the victim when we eliminate from the virtue what is merely external and superficial and go to the heart of the matter.

Let us endeavor to rise to this height of perfection, and see what are the steps whereby we must mount up to it.

The first degree is a fond affection, a supernatural esteem, a kind of enthusiasm for the virtue of poverty.

In order to estimate it aright, one ought to listen to the raptures of the saints, the utterances, for instance, of the Poor Man of Assisi (thus he styled himself), that impassioned lover of poverty, who, abounding as he did in the riches of Christ, found in the embrace of her whom he called his lady, his bride, his beloved, all his joy, his sweetest consolation, life itself.

It is wonderful to see how all the true disciples of Our Lord loved that virtue which men despise so heartily. Who amongst them did not entertain for it a special fondness, a loving predilection, strange and touching to behold. They all regarded it with the affection that thrills the heart of a child when he perceives his dearly-loved mother. Why is this? Because (amongst other reasons) poverty, being the spouse of Jesus Christ, is in reality our Mother; we were conceived amid the destitution of the crib, and born amid the nakedness of the cross; because poverty was the inseparable companion of the Redeemer, our adorable Victim, throughout His sojourn on earth. We know what was His life in this respect at Bethlehem, at

Nazareth, during His public ministry, and that after His death He was beholden to a stranger for a place of sepulture. And is not His presence in the Holy Eucharist a standing proof that poverty is everywhere and always a virtue dear to His Heart?" This is why the saints who aspire to be made one with Jesus in His character of a Victim invariably love poverty most fondly.

There is another reason: She is the Queen of all the virtues, as the Doctors and Fathers of the Church tell us. St. Catharine of Sienna asserts the same in her dialogues, or rather she records the words that God Himself spoke to her, His spouse. "When once the soul is attached to poverty, she finds all the virtues, the graces, the sweetness and consolation that she desires. She fears neither hunger nor privation because faith illumines her and her hopes are placed on Me, who am her Creator, the Giver of all riches; and by the care of My providence all creatures have their meat in due season. Poverty makes him pure who embraces it; it takes from him the empty riches which were to him a source of defilement; it induces him to give up the society of undesirable companions and provides him with those that are profitable; it rouses him from the stupor of indifference and releases him from worldly troubles; it takes all bitterness from this world's wealth and leaves the sweetness; the thorns are removed without the rose losing any of its beauty. It purges the soul from the corrupt humor of unruly affections and encourages her to feed upon virtue, which is sweet to the taste. It gives him two servants to do all the work of his house; they are Love and Hatred. The hatred of vice and sensuality purifies the soul from her stains, while the love of virtue embellishes her by banishing servile apprehension and substituting for it the peace which results from a holy and salutary fear."

These words addressed by Our Lord to His illustrious

servant, and the hopes they evoke, are the consolation and joy of the saints. This explains their intense love for holy poverty.

Why, I ask again, is this so? Because poverty entitles one to the possession of celestial bliss. It is a pledge and foretaste, an earnest of eternal felicity. He who is Truth itself has said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Blessed, blessed a thousand times are they, even in this land of exile! The French have a homely proverb: *As happy as a poor man.* The fervent Religious who loves poverty and practises it knows how great is the interior happiness and content which it produces. How could this be otherwise, since the kingdom of heaven is his? "The love of poverty," says St. Bernard, "is more than a virtue; it is a beatitude, the first and foremost of beatitudes. To the other virtues great things are promised, but to this one the possession of the kingdom of heaven is given, not promised, for already in this world it is given to it."

Why, O Christian soul, you who are a Religious, should you not possess this happiness whilst still on earth? Why not mount up to this height of bliss, this ineffable and supreme joy? By becoming really poor, you will attain this happiness that the saints enjoyed; you will make your own those riches which rust and moth do not consume, which thieves do not steal, if you entertain a supreme, an absolute contempt for the despicable, the worthless treasures of earth. I beseech you, for the sake of your own peace, your own joy, be poor, poor in reality, poor in spirit. And if you do not as yet experience the ardent, enthusiastic affection for this celestial virtue whereby the saints were animated, inebriated, make it the object of your most fervent prayers to obtain it. In your meditations search out the most powerful motives for desiring it; appeal to the Heart of Jesus, poor in the crib, poor on

the cross, poor at all times and in all places; appeal to the heart of Mary, also a friend, a lover of this queenly virtue; appeal to the heart of Joseph, the poor and lowly artisan of Nazareth; call upon the saints, entreat them to give you the grand, the glorious, the gladsome spirit of poverty. Let your petitions be accompanied by a practical good will; set yourself to work with caution and prudence. See that you keep your vow; beware of breaking the promise made to God and of sinning against the virtue; aim at attaining by degrees to the perfection of your vocation as one of Christ's poor, to be the poor servant, the poor spouse of your crucified Lord. Remember that this is the means whereby you may enter into possession of the kingdom of heaven whilst still in this valley of tears. *Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum cœlorum.*

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE SECOND AND THIRD DEGREES OF THE VIRTUE OF POVERTY.

THE first degree of perfection in the virtue of poverty is, as we have seen, a fond and ardent affection for it.

The second consists in the care with which we choose, even in necessary things, what is most worthless and old, what is poorest, in a word. To be content with what is strictly and absolutely necessary is simply an act of the virtue of poverty; but to wish, even in regard to necessaries, only to have what is worst and poorest, this is the virtue in its perfection.

Now this vigilant care, this loving desire for poverty in its perfection, ought to embrace everything: our room, furniture, clothes, the things in daily use, and our food. The least commodious cell—furniture consisting of what is old and well worn (so long as it can still be used), threadbare and patched clothes, articles in daily use of the simplest and commonest description, poor and common food —what a handful of treasures!

Let us never forget, that in virtue of our vow, of the spirit of poverty, we are really and truly poor. If we see a beggar go by, let us say to ourselves in all sincerity: I am worse off than that mendicant. He may become a rich man, but I never can; he is not bound to love poverty in a practical manner as I am. He may possess things and dispose of them at will, but I can not; if he is content with the necessaries of life, surely I ought to

be! If he meets with a refusal when he asks for a piece of bread as an alms when he is hungry, he goes away, conscious that he can not claim it as his right, and ought I to be surprised and annoyed if occasionally something which I fancy to be necessary is denied me?

Holy poverty, destitution, indigence! A state worthy of envy; may it please almighty God to give us grace to taste its sweet savor!

We ought to desire what is most consistent with poverty in what is necessary, to delight in it, both in health and in sickness, whether we are in the lowest place or are raised to an important and responsible post.

In the time of sickness, the temptation to depart from this resolution is great; we are naturally anxious about our health, we have an instinctive dread of disease and death. The sick man fancies that if he could have some special remedy, if he could have more done for him, or the advice of one particular doctor, it would be an immense relief to him. He deludes himself, for alas! it too often happens that a Religious, exemplary enough until then, will in a short time lose in sickness the virtue he gained when in health. The author of the Imitation says: "Few are improved by sickness:" *Pauci ex infirmitate meliorantur*; and it is a fact well known in monasteries that sickness is a test whereby may be gauged the amount of virtue acquired by the monk or nun in health.

It behooves Religious also to take pleasure in having about them whatever is most poor and mean, even when they hold offices and fill posts of authority. If Superiors are animated by such sentiments their example is a source of the greatest blessings to the Community. The description of the cell occupied by the excellent nun whose utterances concerning poverty were quoted in the aforegoing chapter is such as would put to shame many a modern Superior.

Although she was the Mother-General of a wide-spread Congregation, her biographer tells us that her room was almost devoid of furniture, and what there was betokened the most abject poverty. She had neither table nor desk, and generally wrote upon her lap, or, sitting upon the floor, employed a broken chair as a writing-desk. Her pens and paper were kept in an old pasteboard box. Everything else was in harmony; her jug and basin were of the cheapest, commonest, brown earthenware; she did not allow herself a glass to drink out of, and the two religious pictures—one of St. Genevieve, the other of St. Benedict Labre—which alone adorned the walls were in so tattered a condition that the Sisters had thrown them aside as no longer serviceable. Her crucifix also, which she invariably held clasped to her breast at night, was such as no one else would have retained.

Wondrous indeed is the poverty of the saints! Their pious excesses call for our admiration, and to a certain extent for our imitation.

The third degree of poverty is still more perfect than the second. It consists in rejoicing in the want even of necessaries.

To want even the bare necessaries of life is the highest delight of God's elect. Our Lord said: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." At the sight of their King reduced to such an extremity, His saints, His loyal subjects, His devoted friends, long to share His divine destitution. To be wanting in necessaries because of the extreme poverty of the House, to have scanty, uncomfortable quarters, to be unprovided with warm clothes to protect one from the cold, to be short of necessary furniture and of the utensils indispensable for daily use, because the money to purchase them is not forthcoming, this is a great favor bestowed by Heaven, and the period of

want is the time of greatest fervor in Communities. It is a loving benediction given by God's fatherly hand at the outset; and the memories clinging to the initial stages of the life of a Congregation or Community are the happiest, the sweetest, the dearest to the hearts of those who delight in the divine indigence of Jesus, their Spouse.

Instances are found in which Religious have actually wanted bread. No doubt everything ought to be done with prudence and discretion. It ill becomes poor sinners to reckon, as the saints did, on the miraculous succor of their Father in heaven. Yet this miraculous aid is vouchsafed as frequently in our own day as in the days of yore.

To delight in the want of necessaries, even when on a sick-bed, is something closely akin to heroism. Yet we see how the poor often lack necessaries, the indigent poor of our large cities herded together in some attic, the poor of remote country solitudes, dwellers in some hovel on a mountainside, almost out of the reach of civilization, and are we not poor like them, more needy even than they are?

St. Bernard spoke of this heroic love of poverty as of something quite natural and ordinary in his day. "You certainly may, if you are ill," he says, "make use of certain medicinal herbs which the poor find salutary; but to go far and near to purchase drugs and dose one's self with strange potions is unbecoming to the religious profession, and contrary to holy poverty. This is what worldlings do, and we know that those who worship their bodies can not be pleasing in God's sight."

To be wanting in everything and to find satisfaction in this universal privation even when sick, even on one's death-bed, is to be truly united to Christ crucified. It is one of the holiest, noblest features of the love for Jesus in His character of Victim. Our dear Lord has sometimes

deigned to set this stamp upon His chosen servants. Witness the death of St. Francis Xavier, in the remote island of San Chan.

We must not, however, neglect to add that such sublime heroism is a very special and peculiar grace. We aim at union with Our Lord as a Victim, and happy indeed would it be for us were His divine grace to conduct us to those delightful heights where union with Him is made perfect; but we must be led by His all-merciful grace, not urged by our own presumption, or that will prove our ruin, and be perhaps the first step on the way of perdition.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

The religious vow of chastity is the promise made to God not to marry, and to keep from breaking the sixth and ninth commandments.

We say: The *religious* vow of chastity, not merely the vow of chastity, because the religious vow imposes an obligation which a vow of chastity taken by a person living in the world does not involve, the obligation of celibacy. And this is why:

Chastity is a virtue which compels us to keep the sixth and ninth commandments. Even a married person in the world could take a vow of chastity, as thereby she would only pledge herself to do nothing contrary to that angelic virtue. In the same way, a young person who had no intention to remain unmarried, could take a vow of chastity; she would only be binding herself never to offend against chastity. In fact it is a mistake to imagine that this virtue prohibits marriage.

It is otherwise in respect to the vow taken in religion. It necessarily implies the renunciation of marriage, and the Religious who should be so unhappy as to contract such an alliance would break his vow and commit a mortal sin. Besides, as may readily be understood, he would give shocking scandal. It is not necessary to explain this any more; the important point is to specify the number of sins that the Religious would commit should he have the misfortune to infringe the sixth or ninth commandment.

Theologians agree in assigning to this fault a threefold malignity, so that it would be equivalent to three distinct sins, which must be severally mentioned in confession.

1. It would be a sin against the fair virtue of chastity and, as we know, sins of this nature can not be said to be a light matter, and therefore if there be actual consent of the will, the sin can not possibly be merely a venial one.

2. It would be a sin against the virtue of religion, known as an act of perfidy, because a promise made to God would be broken; in other words, there would be a violation of the vow, and this second sin would be no less heinous than the first.

3. It would constitute another sin against that same virtue of religion, a sin of sacrilege, because the Religious being consecrated to God by virtue of his vow, every violation of that vow involves a profanation of something sacred. This sin would be no less flagrant than the others.

Moreover, St. Liguori is of opinion that most probably there would, in this case, be a fourth sin, a grave sin against charity, if there was any danger of the Order or Congregation being disgraced by the crime of one of its members.

It must, however, be remembered that we are speaking of definite, voluntary sins, not of these morbid imaginings, or certain sensual desires of a humiliating character which, far from being sinful, are an occasion of glorious conquest to watchful, careful souls who are anxious to preserve intact the priceless treasure of purity. The most eminent saints have experienced such trials. St. Paul complained of the buffets of Satan; and in the Lives of the Fathers we read of a holy abbess named Sara, who for thirteen years suffered the most violent stings of the flesh. Yet all, without exception, turned them to profit, power, as St. Paul says, being made perfect in their infirmity.

Sins against the virtue and the vow of chastity are

therefore all acts, whether interior or exterior, that directly violate the sixth or ninth commandment, be they sins of thought, of desire, of word, or of deed. However there are also acts, both exterior and interior, which without constituting an actual breach of those commandments smooth the way in the case of a negligent Religious for that prevarication, and on this account they merit particular attention. Speaking in general they consist in allowing the thoughts and senses too great liberty. We will enumerate them succinctly, but it must be observed beforehand that the acts in question would be in themselves mortal sins, supposing that they afforded a proximate occasion of consenting to sin by thought, desire, or act.

The exterior acts are:

1. Immortification of the eyes. This consists in immodest glances at persons or things suggestive of sensual thoughts; in reading books that are utterly irreligious, novels, frivolous poems, etc. "Death is come up through our windows" (Jer. ix. 21), we read in Holy Scripture; and the same thought is expressed still more emphatically in the words: "What is created more wicked than an eye?" (Ecclus. xxxi. 15.) An indiscreet look may introduce trouble and confusion into a soul till then wholly pure; a frivolous book may be the beginning of incurable evils. Listen to the advice Mère Emilie gives on this point to her daughters:

"Ought not the Religious who is really faithful to her vow, if she has any sense at all of her own dignity, ought she not, I say, to be afraid lest she should not show sufficient respect for her eyes, I will not say by letting them rest upon anything indecorous, but even by contemplating with satisfaction, for instance, the beauty of some one of her own sex, without raising her thoughts higher, without elevating them to God, who alone is perfect and sovereign beauty, beauty of which all created loveliness is but a

feeble reflection? And if I ask of you this reticence in regard to women, even good women, what modesty, what caution ought you not to observe toward individuals of the opposite sex, even while the most solemn ceremonies are being celebrated. Why do we wear a veil if not that we may neither see nor be seen? Why is our veil black if not to denote that the bodily eyes ought to be closed, dead as it were, to all the things of earth, in order that the eyes of the soul may be fixed more attentively on the things of heaven, on the things of God? St. Paul wished that out of respect for the ministers of the sanctuary, all Christian women should have their head covered with a veil. What would he not have expected of a nun?"

2. Immortification of the hearing. This, again, is fraught with much danger. What an amount of mischief may result from the gratification felt in listening to subtle flattery, the complimentary speeches current in society, expressions of interest and affection couched perhaps in language of too endearing a tone; from the pleasure experienced in hearing the news of the day, listening to accounts of worldly festivities, of the establishments kept by great people, of human friendships, of the marriages that are arranged, etc.!

Religious who are employed in the education of the young ought to be very careful not under any pretext whatsoever to allow the girls they teach to make all manner of confidences to them, especially to speak of anything that troubles their conscience. They have not the grace to deal with such matters; that is the prerogative of the confessor.

3. Immortification of the smell. An old Father once said: "Perfumes have an enervating effect and induce effeminacy of manners; they are provocative of voluptuousness and license." Those who are truly chaste deny themselves the gratification derived from the sense of smell, although

it certainly is not the most dangerous; however it is enough that scents should have a sensuous tendency to make them a forbidden luxury. Every kind of perfume about one's dress, or books, even flowers that have a strong scent, are avoided as inimical to perfect purity. Such souls only wish to run after the odor of the celestial ointments; the perfumed incense of prayer alone has attractions for them; they only desire to bear about with them the good odor of Christ.

4. Immortification of the tongue. There are witticisms, equivocal jokes, exaggerated expressions of affection and fondness either written or spoken, worldly and profane songs, all of which are most unbecoming on lips that are consecrated to God by the vows of religion, by frequent reception of holy communion.

The venerable Foundress of the Sainte Famille said to her daughters: "Let me warn you, my Sisters, never to amuse yourselves by joking, however innocently, with persons of the other sex. Remember that more than once an unfavorable judgment has been formed of Religious on account of some flighty words or unguarded looks; be grave and serious in your demeanor rather than lively. Be just the same in conversing with priests; one naturally feels more at one's ease with them, and if one is not on one's guard, one is more liable than when in the company of seculars to allow one's self a certain freedom which may lead one to overstep the limits of the profound respect due to their sacred calling."

The maxim oft repeated by the saints when addressing monks is well known: "Let your conversations with women be infrequent, brief, and guarded."

5. Immortification of the sense of touch. This consists in handling one's own person needlessly, in familiarities with others, the childish habit of holding hands, or simply touching the people with whom one lives without any

reason, and above all in being too demonstrative in signs of fondness and affection. If these acts arise from an irregular attachment, they are capable of kindling a fatal conflagration in the soul. One of the Fathers said: "There is nothing more perilous than the sense of touch."

6. Immortification in one's general deportment. This is displayed by a certain listless bearing, and attitudes more befitting the drawing-room than the monastery. The effeminate, self-indulgent Religious who allows himself to be mastered by this fault seems engrossed in attending to his personal wants and bodily comforts. In all minor miseries, such as the disagreeable sensation caused by the weather, the heat, or the cold, his one anxiety appears to be to avoid suffering and discomfort.

There is another irregularity included under this head: I mean manners and behavior which savor of worldliness and vanity, in attitudes, gait, and bearing, the habit of assuming easy postures, the very way of putting on one's clothes. All this is dangerous, because the motive whence it arises is the wish to be agreeable and to please: a wish fatal to the perfection of the virtue of chastity. Some individuals have a sort of irresistible craving to appear always *comme il faut*, and then instinctively, almost without their own knowledge, these silly souls spare no effort to attain this childish object. What sorrow this must cause to the Heart of Jesus, the loving, devoted Spouse of souls! The saints did not hesitate to call this contemptible anxiety to please one's fellow-creatures, by the harsh term of spiritual adultery in one who was consecrated to God.

Such are the different exterior faults which may prove highly detrimental to the vow and the virtue of chastity.

The interior acts are:

1. Certain memories of the past. The world with its business, its festivities, and its pleasures ought to be com-

pletely forgotten. There are, besides, sins committed in bygone days, the remembrance of which would be fatal, if we allowed our thoughts to dwell on them. The words of St. Paul are true to the letter here: "Forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press toward the mark" (Phil. iii. 13). That which belongs to the past, says St. Augustine, is entirely temporal, and consequently contemptible and unworthy of consideration by a soul that aspires to the possession of eternal treasures; what lies before me are the virtues of my new calling and the celestial glory which will be their reward.

2. Some alluring images conjured up by the imagination. Holy Scripture expressly warns us against falling into this fatal snare. "Set not thy heart upon dreams" (Ecclus. xxxiv. 6). The imagination is an *ignis fatuus*, a will-o'-the-wisp, capable of leading the soul to the brink of an abyss.

3. Attachments of too close and fond a character. This point merits special consideration, and to it we shall devote the following chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON CHASTITY OF THE HEART.

THE soul of every Religious is a victim consecrated to God. Now every victim ought to be holy, pure, and spotless Under the ancient law, wherein everything was figurative and symbolical, the animal offered in sacrifice was to be without fault or blemish. In the Book of Deuteronomy we read: "If it (the animal) have a blemish or be lame or in any part disfigured or feeble, it shall not be sacrificed to the Lord thy God" (Deut. xv. 21). And in Exodus and Leviticus the Lord insists on this point: "The victim shall be a lamb without blemish." Our own common sense shows us the reason of this rule, but it has besides a mystical meaning, prophetical of the future and indicating the qualifications indispensable in the spiritual victims which at a later period would be offered to God.

Jesus Christ is the Great Victim, the one only Victim which the victims of the Old Law prefigured. We read that "Him whom the Father hath sanctified" (John x. 36); and when the angel announced His Incarnation to Mary, he calls Him holy by way of distinction: "The holy One which shall be born of thee."

Now Jesus draws many souls into union with His sacrifice. All Christians are called to this union, but those who are virgins are united to Him by a special, a closer bond. St. Jerome says: "Our virginity is preeminently the victim we offer to Christ." And since virgin souls,

unlike the victims of olden times, who were dragged by force to the altar of sacrifice, immolate themselves voluntarily, and thus resemble Our Lord who "was offered because it was His own will" (Is. liii. 7), virgin souls are justly called the priests who officiate at the sacrifice of themselves. Hence St. Ignatius the Martyr said: "Hold those amongst you in high esteem who live a virgin's life, for they are the priests of Jesus Christ."

What an honor is this for these privileged souls! And what a rich source of blessings, provided they are faithful to grace, that is to say, if their intention is pure, their spirit of sacrifice holy, and the victim without blemish, so that the holocaust, according to the words of Holy Scripture, may be of a sweet savor before God!

The important point is this: that sanctity and purity should be the characteristics of the victim. Now the vow of chastity, if it be kept inviolate, is what gives to the soul of the Religious, the true victim of God, these essential characteristics. In the preceding chapter we have shown what the initial purification ought to be: the Religious ought to avoid with the utmost solicitude, not only what would be a direct and voluntary stain, but even every frame of mind, every act which might lead to it; and if he is careful not to grow slack in the exercise of this vigilance, his life will abound in occasions of sacrifice and he will fulfil the sacrificial functions conferred on him; in body and soul he will become the "living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God," of which St. Paul speaks. Yet there is a further height of perfection to be climbed, a more perfect sacrifice to be offered: the immolation of the heart itself, of its affections, its inclinations, of its least and lightest pulsation which might sully the angelic purity which ought to adorn it in God's sight. The reader will remember the words St. Francis of Sales addressed to a postulant for admission into the Visitation: "I must

needs tell you that you are now dead to the world and the world is dead to you. That is the first stage in the holocaust. There yet remains to flay the victim by stripping your heart of itself, cutting off ruthlessly all that recalls nature and the world."

Purity of the affections constitutes chastity of heart. The heart feels the irresistible need of loving, but it must only love in God and for God.

The objects on which the Religious places his affections are either members of his Community, the pupils brought up in the House (if there are any), or externes. Both classes of persons ought to be loved in God only. How can this be? We will enter into more minute explanations; in general what is said on this subject may be considered as intended rather for nuns than for monks, as it is more needed by them.

1. Chastity of heart in one's relations to the Superior. At first sight it would seem that no warning is needed here, since there is no apparent peril. Superiors hold the place of father or mother to their respective Communities; it is therefore only right that the Religious should regard them not only with respect, but with love, a love all the more affectionate and heartfelt because very frequently the monk or nun has no one else to love on earth. Thus to condemn that affection would be unreasonable and unjust; it would be depriving souls consecrated to God of one of the dearest consolations of this life of exile, and prohibiting what, after all, is a duty. However fondly we may love those who stand toward us in the place of God, our affection will not equal that of Our Lord when a child for His holy Mother and St. Joseph. Yet our divine Teacher said to His apostles: "It is expedient to you that I go;" and biblical expositors tell us that by these words He indicated the existence of something earthly in the affection they felt for His sacred humanity.

Now if it was needful for the disciples of the divine Master, St. John and St. Peter, to purify their hearts and refine yet more the affection they bore Him, if there was a want of faith, an admixture of human love in that affection, can we wonder that this same element of imperfection should be met with in Religious, and that it should be requisite to retrench, to sacrifice something in this respect? In the apostles, it will be understood, there was nothing that could be objected to in such feelings; whereas for souls who can not have, as they had, Our Lord in person for their Director and their Master, there may be much that is undesirable.

For instance, if a nun who is attached to her Superior loves her far more on account of the natural qualities which render her attractive than for any higher motive, what will be the result? In the first place that nun will make no progress, since her affection, not being supernatural, is destitute of merit. In the second place, as the lessons in perfection which she learns of her Superior are invested with no other weight for her than that which her personal character gives them, they will not be accompanied by grace, and one can hardly imagine that she will really profit by them. Finally, supposing the Superior is changed, what will become of that poor nun? Is it not to be feared that her externally correct conduct will sustain an overthrow, since it rested, not on the immutable basis of faith, but on the frail structure of a state of things which has suddenly collapsed?

We only mention here what is least reprehensible, but how many foolish thoughts, how many sensuous puerilities might be enumerated. The nun wants to be always with her adored Superior, she is only happy in her presence. She would almost be willing to give up her meditations and the sacraments for this very earthly gratification. And if, unfortunately, the Superior lends herself to

this childish conduct, who knows how prejudicial it may be, for would she not expose herself to the danger of arousing jealousy in many a heart? If several of the Sisters take up such fancies, what a loss of time, to say the least! And if a considerable proportion of the Community are infected by this folly, all manner of irregularities may be predicted. Alas, how pitiful is such infatuation among the spouses of Our Lord!

But it may be said: Undoubtedly what you describe is productive of much that is pernicious, but where is the virtuous middle course to be found? There must be cordiality, freedom to a certain extent, in one's intercourse with the Superior, otherwise there would be no simplicity, no pleasant relations, no filial candor.

The answer to this is easy. Every one knows that in fervent Communities these desirable dispositions increase in rectitude and in spirituality, the more the Religious only see God in their Superiors. Then all is tranquil and peaceful, all is pleasant and serene in their mutual relations, all is firm and yet sweet. Gentleness, kindness, simplicity, filial openness of heart become the Christian virgin; they are indispensable to the perfection of the life she has embraced, but grace alone, the grace that flows from the Sacred Heart of Jesus, bestows those fair virtues. Let the nun frequently ask herself: How did Mary behave during the twelve years she spent in the Temple? How would she have acted in my place? What more admirable than her modesty, her respect for her Superiors, her simplicity and candor of soul, the sanctity of all her affections!

Let Superiors act toward their subjects as we may imagine that Anne, the prophetess, acted toward Mary; and let the subjects love their Superiors as Mary loved that saintly widow, who was, so to speak, her Novice-mistress and her Superior.

2. Chastity of heart in regard to one's fellow-Religious. We shall have to say later on, in speaking of charity in the fourth part of this work, that there is nothing more sweet and attractive, nothing holier in itself and more conducive to sanctity, than the union of souls in Jesus Christ. When our gentle and loving Saviour is the bond that unites the hearts of men, they are no longer dwellers in the land of exile, they may be said to be already in their true country. Happy the Community whose members really form but one heart and one soul in God! How true are the Psalmist's words: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm cxxxii. 1).

But, be it remembered, this joy, this happiness, this interior exultation which is reflected even on the countenance, only lasts as long as the souls who enjoy and delight in it grant no access to the curse of sensuous friendships. It is the bane of charity, it is the evil which drives away the Holy Spirit, it is the commencement of spiritual ruin. Our God is a jealous God; He will not, He can not tolerate in the heart of His spouses the mere trace of a love which is not for Him. How unhappy is the fate of the thoughtless, earthly-minded soul, who, forgetful of her solemn promises and the signal favor of being entitled His spouse, gives way to some ill-regulated affection for a fellow-creature! How sad is such a condition! How many graces that soul loses through her own fault! What becomes of that interior peace which, to quote St. Paul's words, surpasseth all understanding? Of that intimate intercourse with Our Lord in meditation and in communion? Of the favors bestowed by the divine Spouse? And if we turn to externals, where is the peaceful, modest composure, the punctual, unfailing exactitude, the application of heart and mind to her daily work that marked that nun? Does she exhibit in her intercourse with the

Sisters the same universal, invariable charity which forms the true happiness of the Religious?

Alas! much that is to be deplored has found ingress into the soul with that fatal indulgence which the saints have branded with the name of sensual affection, particular friendships. What a sad abuse of grace, portentious of future sterility for the soul, impotency ever to rekindle her early fervor! For, we repeat, the divine Bridegroom is jealous; when He has withdrawn from an unfaithful spouse, words can not tell the efforts that have to be made, the penance that must be done, the tears that must be shed before He will return and again rejoice her with His friendship, His choicest favors, His divine caresses.

Let every Religious be distrustful of all affection that agitates, disturbs, distracts her heart. Certainly she need not disquiet herself about a mere nothing; but she will do well, as soon as she is conscious of the first sign of such fondness, to disclose her feelings to a discreet and wise confessor. This manifestation of the heart, if it be simple, humble, and modest, will be the best antidote to a poison which may perhaps prove fatal to her spiritual life.

All that has been said is specially applicable to the case of a Religious (the member of a teaching Order) who conceives a warm friendship for one of her pupils. The mere thought of what the consequences of such an affection may be for both teacher and pupil makes one tremble. The angel guardians, who weep over it, alone can tell to what lengths it may go, and sometimes has gone. What a terrible responsibility for the Religious who is faithless to her vocation to such an extent, faithless to her mission, to the graces lavished on her to be employed in training souls for the service of God! Who can say with what severity the divine Spouse will treat that nun, whose spiritual children ought to be holy, and whom she herself

perverts, by foolish fondling, by indulgences and favors of a worldly, frivolous description verging on what is indecorous? Alas, the passions of the young are more quickly kindled than some of us imagine. Therefore all outward signs of particular friendship, given either by hand or eye, must be forbidden. They are never advisable, under any pretext whatsoever; and indulgence in them does the work of the devil and of our fallen nature, not that of Christ and His grace.

3. Chastity of heart in regard to persons outside the convent. There is not much to be said on this point, because in general the absence of chaste feeling would argue a want of delicacy. Besides, it is obvious that if carnal affections are forbidden in regard to the Superior and the Sisters, much more would they be forbidden when it is a question of seculars. Some nuns are brought into contact with ladies living in the world through the charitable works in which they both take part. They must remember that very rarely can an intimate friendship, should they form one, be in Christ and for Christ, and they must not overlook the fact that their friends occupy a very different position to themselves. I can scarcely say that it is well for a soul who is consecrated to God to be on very intimate terms with a married woman, unless at least they are both no longer young. Friends become confidential; and the confidences in this case naturally relate to the troubles and difficulties attached to the state of life of the friend who lives in the world. No good can result from this, and it may be productive of much that is undesirable. The soul who is consecrated to God should remember her whom she daily invokes under the title of *most prudent Virgin.*

Finally must we mention the confessor, the director? The confessor is the servant of God, and in this character, in this alone, the nun holds intercourse with him, conse-

quently she ought to see in him only God's representative, just as the priest only speaks to the nun as being the mouthpiece of the Most High. She is in want of enlightenment, of consolation, of strength; it must be divine enlightenment, divine consolation, divine strength that she asks and expects from the ministry of the priest. She can not fail to feel grateful to him for the help he has afforded her; but this gratitude must not rest in the instrument, but rise upward through him to God, the only Giver of all good. Thus nothing useless passes between them, no time is wasted; all their intercourse is profitable both for the director himself and the soul whom he directs. When St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross met together in the parlor, to converse upon spiritual subjects, they were both seen to be raised from the ground, rapt in ecstasy. This example should ever be borne in mind. We certainly must not expect the grace of ecstasy; but the intercourse between the nun and her spiritual Father ought, like that of St. Teresa and St. John, to be all for God and in God, whether in the confessional or in the parlor. O my God! vouchsafe to give ever more and more of this celestial spirit to Thy priests and Thy spouses!

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE ENCLOSURE AND THE SPIRIT OF THE CLOISTER.

The enclosure is one of the chief blessings of the religious life, one of the chief causes of rejoicing to the soul who appreciates the graces of her vocation. In the designs of holy Church, it was established mainly to safeguard the chastity of those who were consecrated to God by vow. This is the reason why we introduce this subject here immediately after having spoken of the vow of chastity.

But the enclosure, although instituted for the preservation of that priceless treasure, is the source of a multitude of other blessings. It is also the safeguard of silence, of simplicity, of mutual charity, of the spirit of prayer, of interior peace, of union with God, which is all the more easily obtained the more the soul isolates herself from the world and its vain delights. By means of the enclosure the monastery is really the "garden enclosed" wherein the Beloved celebrates with His spouse the spiritual nuptials which are the earnest of the eternal espousals; it is also the true earthly paradise, at the gate of which the cherubim keep watch with jealous vigilance, to prevent the approach of intruders.

From another point of view, this law of the Church in regard to Religious recalls to mind what was customary in olden times under the Old Dispensation. The victim that was to be offered and slain for sacrifice was separated

from the rest of the flock and kept apart. From that time forth it could not be put to any secular use; it would have been a sacrilegious act to employ it otherwise than in the service of God. No one was allowed to touch it, except the priest whose office it was to immolate it as a holocaust to the Lord.

In like manner the Religious is entirely isolated from the world and all the things of the world by the enclosure; and in the seclusion of the cloister the soul surrenders herself continually, unseen by all but God, to His good pleasure, for love of Him and for His greater glory. No one interferes with her, for she is dedicated to God. Neither relatives nor friends are allowed to distract her attention from God, or fill her mind with worldly matters. She is laid upon the altar of sacrifice, and there she will remain, at one and the same time the priest and victim of the oblation she untiringly offers to Him who is her All in all.

One can understand why good Religious love the enclosure intensely, almost passionately. Without the monastery walls they feel out of their element, they miss the air which is the breath of life to them; and well for them that it is so, for thus they are kept from many faults. Doubtless this love of the cloister ought not to detract from their zeal and fidelity in performing the works which charity or obedience require of them; but, far from this, it does just the contrary. It gives strength and constancy to their zeal and fidelity, adding to their supernatural character and at the same time sanctifying the works of which they are the source. The Religious betakes himself to those works with greater modesty, humility, prudence, with closer union with God, and consequently all that he does is attended with a richer blessing and more profit both for the souls of others and for himself.

It is the same with the cloistered nun. When she has to present herself at the grating, it is a real sacrifice that is required of her; and well for her if she feels acutely that it is a sacrifice, for that is a great grace vouchsafed to her.

But because actual enclosure can not rightly be said to appertain to the essence of the religious life, while the spirit of enclosure is essential to the perfection of that life, many Institutes are not enclosed, owing to their members engaging in active works. Yet what we have to say will not be useless for them. They will see what holy Church intends by the Rule of enclosure, and our explanations as to what is prescribed by it can not fail to be profitable for them; moreover the spirit of enclosure, which is necessary both for Orders that are enclosed and those that are not, will thereby be strengthened and increased.

We can at any rate only give a few general details about this Rule, as what is special to each Order will be found in its Constitutions.

There is enclosure for men and enclosure for women, the latter being naturally much more strict.

What is called the law of enclosure is a law issued by the Church forbidding outsiders to enter the cloister of a Religious House, and forbidding the inmates to leave it. This law has been confirmed and expounded by the Council of Trent and several successive Popes.

There is an immense difference, the reason of which must be apparent to every one, between the enclosure of Communities of men and Communities of women. The latter is always very much stricter; in fact, there is no Order of men so strictly cloistered as are the Carmelite nuns, the Poor Clares, the Trappistines, etc. The law of enclosure for men only prescribes, in general, two rules to be observed.

1. Women are prohibited, under pain of excommunication, from entering the enclosure of men under any pretext whatsoever. Superiors or other Religious who should admit them would incur grievous penalties, such as deprivation of their office, etc.

2. No Religious (no monk, that is) may go out of his monastery without permission from his Superior. The Constitutions of Pope Clement VIII. on this point run thus:

"Let no monk venture to leave his convent unless for some good reason and after having each time obtained permission from his Superior, who ought not to concede it until he has satisfied himself as to the justice of the petitioner's motive and assigned to him a companion. This *socius* is to be chosen not by the Religious himself, but by the Superior, who will take care not to select the same individual too often. A general permission to go out must never be given to any one Religious."

No more need be said concerning the enclosure in regard to Communities of men; but we will enter into some details of this law in its application to convents of women. The decree of the Council of Trent is as follows:

"The sacred Council, in renewing the Constitution of Boniface VIII., commands all bishops under pain of the judgment of God, whom it takes to witness, and under pain of eternal malediction, in virtue of their authority over the convents that are subject to them, and as delegates of the Holy See in regard to those that are exempt from their episcopal jurisdiction, to be most careful to reestablish the enclosure of Religious women in Houses where it has been broken, and to uphold it in its integrity in all Houses where it has been duly observed, desiring them to rebuke by ecclesiastical censures and other penalties any person who should dare to disobey or oppose their mandate. No nun will therefore be allowed to go

beyond the precincts of her monastery, subsequently to her profession, even for a short time, under any pretext whatsoever, unless it be for some legitimate cause approved by the bishop, despite any indult or privilege which may apparently authorize her in so doing.

"Neither shall any individual of whatever birth, rank, sex, or age be allowed to enter the enclosure of the monastery without a written permission from the bishop or the Superior, under pain of excommunication *ipso facto.* And that permission must not be granted by the bishop or the Superior without necessity, and no other person has any power at all to grant it."

From these ecclesiastical decrees we learn that cloistered Religious are bound, 1. Never to leave the precincts of their convent; 2. Never to admit any strangers into the interior of their convent.

The exceptional cases in either instance are provided for by canon law, and may also be contained in the special Constitutions of each Order. For this reason we will not discuss them here; but it may be useful to point out the ways in which a nun may transgress the Rule of enclosure.

1. The obligation never to go out of the convent. She will trangress this rule if she so much as steps out beyond the limit of the enclosure, or the precincts of the cloister, or by climbing up upon the convent roof. A nun who had received a proper authorization to go out would break the rule by not returning as soon as the time fixed by the dispense had expired. 2. The obligation never to admit outsiders into the convent. A nun would transgress this commandment, (1) By taking any one into the convent without the authorization of her lawful Superior, even were it a mere infant; (2) By urging such persons as have been permitted to enter to remain longer than necessity requires, or by taking them where there is no

occasion for them to go, even under the plea of charity or devotion. Thus if the chaplain should have gone into the enclosure to administer the sacraments to a sick Sister, he must not go elsewhere to visit another sick Sister who had not asked for the sacraments. (3) A nun whose business it is to see that the doors of the enclosure are kept locked would commit a sin were she to neglect that duty.

Such are the principal ways whereby the Rule of enclosure may be transgressed; but a fervent Religious does not confine herself to a careful avoidance of any breach of the Church's law; she endeavors to enter into the intentions of our holy Mother, and strives to live in perfect accordance with the spirit of the cloister. On that account she scrupulously avoids all intercourse with the world; she holds herself aloof from it, she keeps it at a distance, and says with St. Paul: "The world is crucified to me and I to the world" (Gal. vi. 14). The demands of charity, of obedience, the occupations assigned her, the active works in which her Order engages, may perhaps require her to mix to a certain extent with secular persons; but interiorly she has nothing in common with them. St. Paul felt in this way, yet he was no cloistered monk. Such sentiments may quite possibly, in fact they ought to, be the habitual attitude of every soul who is consecrated to God. The business of the world, the news of the world, the visits of the world, with all of this she has no more concern than if she was dead and buried. Nothing has power to touch or agitate her, or distract her from her calling, which is the service of God either by acts of worship or works of charity. Everything from outside, however innocuous it may at first sight appear, is repugnant to her; she regards it as a possible danger for the purity and sanctity which should be hers.

Let us conclude this chapter by relating an incident out of the life of the Ven. Mère Emilie, the model nun of our

day, and listening respectfully to the exhortation she addressed to her subjects on that occasion.

It was at the time of the Revolution of 1848. A sister who had chanced to hear the news, said quite innocently the same day at recreation: "We have a republic now." On the morrow, Mère Emilie delivered an address on the subject, thus expressing her feelings to her daughters:

"Yesterday evening, one of our Sisters, neglectful of the spirit of the cloister, announced that we had a republic now. For this she must humble herself and pray almighty God by the intercession of St. Charles Borromeo to give her grace to understand more fully what the spirit of the vow we have taken requires of us, and how completely indifferent we ought to be to all news of the outside world.

"How happy we should be, my Sisters, if we could always rest in that state of death to the world which the cloister inculcates and which we ought to cultivate. Nothing depicts more forcibly the solitude of the cloister than the solitude of the tomb, the silence, the desertion of the graveyard. Think of a cemetery, how calm, how tranquil it is! The dead do not disturb each other's repose, and when the remains of another is laid amongst them, they inquire about nothing, they do not trouble themselves about what goes on amongst the living, they are silent and motionless, awaiting the solemn hour when the angel of the Lord shall summon them to appear at the general resurrection. They are dead, and with that everything is said. And we who are cloistered nuns ought also to be dead, completely dead to all the empty reports, the foolish interests, the false maxims of the world. When we left the world to embrace the life of the cloister, when we laid aside our secular garments to put on this funereal dress, we made a solemn act of renunciation of all the things of the world, the pleasures of the world, the honors of the world, the riches of the world, the news of the

world. When we were clothed in the sacred habit of religion, the priest of God, speaking in His name, addressed to us these sublime words, pregnant with meaning, borrowed from St. Paul: 'You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ shall appear, who is your life, then you also shall appear with Him in glory' (Col. iii. 3, 4). If we lend a willing ear to news from the outer world, if we ask to have them told us, we show ourselves to be alive, we are not really dead in the sense of our vow in its perfection; if in the cloister we indulge curiosity, if we are easily distracted; if we often break the Rule of silence, again I say we are not really dead, and our life is not hidden, as it ought to be, with Christ. In order worthily to correspond to the solemn words addressed to us at our profession, we ought to fix our mind only on God, on the work we have to do, on our sanctification; we ought to refrain, for instance, from questioning any postulants who may come to us as to where they came from, the circumstances and social position of their parents, unless it is necessary to do so; the dead ask no questions; let us be like them in the spirit of faith, and in diligent pursuance of the perfection to which we hope to attain."

CHAPTER X.

ON THE VOW OF OBEDIENCE.

The Popes, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and all theologians are unanimous in pronouncing the vow of obedience to be the most perfect of the religious vows. They also agree that taking this vow and carrying it out generously, constitutes the perfection of the state of victim which the Religious embraces. The sacrifice is really consummated, nothing is lacking to the holocaust. The sacrificial victim is not only offered and slain, but, to make use of the words of St. Francis of Sales which were quoted above, it is actually reduced to ashes.

Listen to the witness of the Popes and Fathers of the Church. St. Gregory the Great, commenting on these words in the First Book of Kings (xv. 22): "Obedience is better than sacrifices" (the victims of the Old Law are here referred to), says: "Obedience is better, because in ordinary sacrifices the flesh of another is offered; but by obedience one's own will is immolated."

Pope John XXII. speaks yet more explicitly: "Poverty," he says, "is a very excellent thing; virginity is, however, a better thing; while obedience, if it be faithfully practised, takes precedence of all the rest. By the first, one sacrifices one's external possessions; by the second, one's body and one's carnal instincts; by the third, one's heart and mind are immolated."

St. Jerome also says: "To give up one's gold and silver

is the act of a man in the early stages of his conversion; the heathen philosophers did as much; but to offer one's self to God is a virtue peculiar to the apostles and the true Christian."

St. Thomas says much the same when treating of the religious vows. He declares obedience to be superior to chastity for three reasons.

1. Because by the vow of obedience we sacrifice ourselves, our will, our judgment;

2. Because by obedience we are closely united to God, our final end; in fact, by it we are firmly bound and continually united to His holy will;

3. Because obedience includes the practice of every other virtue.

We shall return to this third point later on, but must pause to remark by the way how well obedience forms a part of the victim's life of self-surrender; for St. Thomas, in the first reason he gives for assigning the foremost place to obedience, says that by it we make of ourselves a whole burnt-offering, and we know that the complete immolation of ourselves is an act essential to our life as a victim; while in the second reason he asserts that obedience enables us perfectly to attain our end, which is God, by keeping us closely and constantly united to Him. Such is the condition proper to the victim; it belongs to God, it is immolated for God, it exists for God, it lives before Him and in Him. And as his sacrifice is a holocaust, and in a holocaust God was graciously pleased to accept and take to Himself the victim, so the Religious, by his vow, and the faithful observance of that vow, is made one with God by the most intimate and unbroken union.

We shall, as the reader will undoubtedly expect, speak more at length and more in detail on the subject of the vow of obedience than we did on the two other religious

vows. We will begin with a precise definition of the vow, and proceed to explain the terms of the definition, when explanation is needed, and finally give some theological opinions relating to the practice of the vow.

"The religious vow of obedience is a promise made to God to obey one's lawful Superiors, in all that they command in accordance with the Rule of the Order."

We specify *lawful Superiors*, and we give the names of all who are comprehended under this title, who have, in fact, the right to issue orders to the Religious in virtue of holy obedience.

1. Our Holy Father the Pope. The Sovereign Pontiff may notify his commands to any professed Religious in matters relative to the religious life, not only because, as the Head of the Church, he has the right to require submission and obedience from all the faithful, but because he is in reality and by every right the chief Superior of all religious Institutes; —because from him all Superiors and Heads of Houses who govern religious Communities derive their authority, and in dependence on him they hold it;— and because it follows thence that the Religious, when he makes his profession, pledges himself to fulfil primarily and principally the duty of obedience toward him. Hence we see the connection that exists between the Sovereign Pontiff and religious Institutes.

2. The Congregation of bishops and regular clergy and that of regular discipline. These Congregations are in fact appointed by the Holy See to enforce good government in religious Communities, as may be seen from the Bulls of Popes Sixtus V. and Innocent XII.

3. The Sacred College, provided the Chair of Peter be vacant, during which time it takes the place of the Sovereign Pontiff.

4. The Cardinal Protector, in as far as his powers extend.

5. The Bishop of the diocese in which the monastery is

situated, inasmuch, at least, as it is subject to his authority and jurisdiction.

6. The Superiors General of the Order; this goes without speaking.

7. The local Superiors of the Order. This again is beyond a doubt. But how about subordinate officers—the minister, guest-master, cook, and others? Can they command in virtue of the vow of obedience?

The answer to this question must be found in the Constitutions of each Order severally. But if there is no definite legislation in the Rule or regulations, the following decisions, agreed upon by theologians, may serve as a guide to the Religious in this respect.

In general, the subordinate officials mentioned above, who have one or several of the Religious under them, can not issue commands which are binding under pain of sin, either venial or mortal.

We say *in general*, because it might be that in accordance with the will of a higher Superior, or in virtue of the statutes and Constitutions of the Order, those officials might have the power to make themselves obeyed by those under them as a matter of conscience.

In such a case they would also possess the right to command in virtue of the vow of obedience. Consequently if a Religious subject to their authority were to disobey an order issued in virtue of holy obedience, he would commit two sins: the first against the fourth commandment, which obliges him to obey every lawful Superior, the other against his vow.

If, on the other hand, the inferior officer was not authorized to give an order binding under pain of sin in virtue of the fourth commandment, he could not do so in virtue of the vow of obedience.

But in any case the Religious would do very wrong if, in disobeying, he did so out of definite contempt for au-

thority; for whether he contemns authority in the person of a more highly-placed Superior or in a minor official, it is the same authority that he despises, and this contempt for authority is usually considered as a mortal sin.

The advice given by St. Liguori will come in well here. Speaking to a spouse of Jesus Christ, he says: "If, my Sister, you desire to be really obedient and a good Religious, you ought to obey not merely the ecclesiastical Superior or the Abbess, but all the officials of the convent whom the Rule orders you to obey, such as the infirmarian, the minister, the sacristine; for the Abbess may be obeyed from motives of human respect, whilst, in obeying the other officials, proof is given of a true spirit of humility and of submission."

We said, in our definition of the vow of obedience, that it is a promise made to God to obey one's lawful superiors when they issue orders in accordance *with the Rule*. What is meant by these last words?

They mean that the Religious, in taking a vow of obedience, does not take upon himself any fresh obligations in his character of a Christian and a citizen, but he pledges himself to obey all orders appertaining to the religious life in general which he embraces, and in conformity with the particular Rule of the Order of which he becomes a member. Consequently he pledges himself to do all that the Rule requires of him, but not anything which is *above* or *beyond* the Rule, nor what is *below* the Rule or *contrary* to the Rule. These terms need explanation.

We say that something is *beyond* the Rule when an act of heroic virtue is needed for its accomplishment. In general, the power of the Superior does not go so far as this; we say *in general*, because exceptional circumstances may arise when an order of this kind must not be disobeyed; as, for instance, if a Superior were to order one of his subjects to nurse another member of the Community

who was attacked by the plague, the Religious might be obliged in conscience to obey, even at the risk of his life.

A thing is *below* the Rule if it is ridiculous, strange, or peculiar. A wise Superior rarely gives orders of this nature, and, if he did, it can not be said that the Religious would be bound in conscience to obey.

However, an inferior must not be too ready to pronounce the orders given him to be peculiar, because his pride or self-love revolts against them. From the annals of monasticism we learn that injunctions of this sort were not uncommon even under the rule of the most saintly Superiors. They are a most efficacious means of exercising a Religious in obedience and teaching him to practise this virtue in its perfection. We will give some examples of this presently.

Finally, we say that something is *contrary* to the Rule if it is bad in itself or opposed to the spirit of the Rule, or simply less perfect than what the Rule ordains.

It is easy to understand that a Superior has no right to issue a command of this description, since it would be contrary to the nature of the vow, which ought to make us tend toward perfection. But here again, although the Superior has no right to command anything less perfect than what the Rule enjoins, the Religious is not bound in conscience to obey, yet he must not overlook the fact that what appears to him less perfect may not be so in reality, on account of exceptional circumstances, or special reasons which the Superior may have. Consequently the Religious ought to obey unless what is commanded is obviously contrary to the will of God.

St. Liguori asserts—and he quotes several theologians in support of his opinion—that the inferior is bound to submit even if it should appear to him most probable that what is commanded is not permitted, because the Superior

must be admitted to have an incontestable right to command, so long as it can not be proved that he is overstepping the limits of his powers.

This humble, unquestioning obedience is blessed by God, in whose place our Superior stands toward us, and to whom, not to man, under all circumstances our obedience is due.

All that has been said in this chapter refers to the obedience strictly required of and enjoined upon the Religious; but he ought not to rest content with the minimum, he ought to strive after perfect obedience, which has a far wider range and purer motives. This will form the subject of the following chapters.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE EXCELLENCE OF THE VIRTUE OF OBEDIENCE.

WHAT an earthly paradise is this which we have entered! Obedience is the paradise of pleasure, the garden of divine delight. Happy the soul who establishes herself there and makes it her everlasting abode! Day by day we say: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," as if these words epitomized the perfect dispositions of the redeemed in heaven. On earth, the obedient soul does the will of God, and thus for her this land of exile is transformed into heaven here below. "If any one keep My words," Our Lord says, "We will come to him and make Our abode with him;" We, that is, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What an immense honor! What supreme beatitude is this! It is, indeed, heaven upon earth. Now this happiness is the special reward of obedience, for the obedient soul always keeps the commandments of Our Lord.

The obedient soul is the true elect, the predestined, the real saint. These words need explanation, but we know no language sufficiently fervid, sufficiently powerful and persuasive for our purpose. We will let the saints speak for themselves, and tell us, as they do by word and by example, how sublime is obedience, how infinite are its benefits.

Obedience derives its excellence from its object, which is the will of God, revealed to us by the will of the Superior.

St. Bernard speaks thus to his brethren at Clairvaux:

"God has condescended to make our Superiors to a certain extent equal to Himself. He considers the respect or disrespect we manifest toward them as shown to Himself. It is of them He says: "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me;" and our Rule on its part says: "The obedience rendered to the Superior is rendered to God Himself. All that is commanded by the man who stands toward us in the place of God must be received as commanded by God Himself, unless it be unmistakably opposed to the will of God." What matter whether He makes known His will by the lips of His ministers, by angels, or by men?

Brother Giles, one of the first companions of St. Francis of Assisi, is said to have uttered the following bold but just words: "I would rather obey a Superior for the love of God than obey God Himself; for any one who obeys the representative of Jesus Christ would all the more certainly obey Jesus Christ Himself if He gave the command in person."

A pious writer, the author of a lengthy treatise on obedience, who is consequently thoroughly conversant with his subject, says: "There is every reason to believe that the submission which we render to the sovereign majesty of God, when He speaks by the mouth of His representatives on earth, our Superiors, that is, is as acceptable in God's sight as if He spoke in person; and that He is even more pleased with the obedience we show to our Superiors, because it is more difficult to honor Him by our submission when He is concealed and disguised under the form of one who is, perhaps, unworthy to stand in His place, whether on account of ignorance or some other defects, than it would be to honor and obey Him in person."

Quotations from the writings of the saints on this point might be multiplied. We will add one word of instruction to those already given, than which nothing could be

more decided or more worthy of reverence, since it was spoken by Our Lord Himself to B. Margaret Mary. She had received an order from her divine Spouse which her Superior would not allow her to execute. Margaret hesitated what to do, as she could not resolve on acting contrary to the wishes of her Superior; then Our Lord addressed these words to her, which ought to be inscribed in letters of gold on the walls of every religious House:

"I am well pleased that thou dost prefer following the will of thy Superior to Mine. Know that I am not offended at thy opposition to My commands for the sake of obedience, since for that I laid down My life. Therefore I desire that not only shouldst thou do all that thy Superiors bid thee, but also that thou shouldst do nothing that I command thee, without their sanction. For I love obedience, and without it no one can please Me."

Thus there can be no doubt about the transcendent excellence of the virtue of obedience. It places the Religious in communication with God by means of a sublime mystery of faith. For God is not immediately apparent to us; we behold Him under the form of a mortal creature; and thus not only have we the signal honor of being brought into communication with God, but we enjoy that privilege by a sacrifice of our reason and our spiritual senses, which contemplate His adorable Majesty in a dark manner and under the veil of the flesh and of human imperfections.

The indubitable fact that obedience holds the foremost place amongst all the other acts, however holy, of the religious life, is another striking proof of its excellence.

This was the dictum of the ancient Fathers of the desert when, on the occasion of a dispute which arose amongst the monks as to which of the acts of religion the preeminence should be given, the question was referred to them. They answered unanimously: "Our opinion is that obedience

ought to be preferred to manual labor, spiritual reading, to silence, solitude, in short to every other virtue."

One needs but to open the book containing the annals of the Fathers of the desert, in order to see how thoroughly their lives were in conformity with this decision. On every page examples are met with, and illustrations of the truth which is revealed in Holy Scripture: "Obedience is better than sacrifices." As has been said, the superiority of obedience over every other sacrifice, however holy, which the Religious can offer, consists in this, that it is himself, his own person which he gives to be consumed in the flame of charity, of the divine good pleasure, as a perfect holocaust.

He also who is greater than all the saints Himself gives the preference to obedience above everything else, above all the acts most dear to His Sacred Heart. Listen to what St. Bernard says on this point:

"Have you not read in the Gospel how Jesus as a child sets an example of obedience to His faithful servants? He remained behind in Jerusalem, and told His parents that He must occupy Himself with the interests of His Father's glory. But when they did not appear to see this as He did, He went down with them to Nazareth. He, their Lord and Master, does not disdain to conform His conduct to what His disciples think advisable; He who is God is obedient to men; He is eternal Wisdom, yet He submits to a working-man and a lowly woman. What is said of Him in the Gospel? 'He was subject to them.'"

Then the saint, addressing those Religious who think it a hard matter to obey, adds these memorable words:

"How is this? The wisdom of God submits to be directed and controlled by a carpenter and a woman; His divine, unerring knowledge yields to the finite opinion of mortal man; and you find it difficult to give up your judgment to the will of God, who enlightens you through the

medium of your Superior! You have yet to learn that true magnanimity consists in submission to others. For however lofty, however useful the services may be which you propose to render to God, they must invariably give way to obedience, since the basis upon which the Religious must raise the structure of perfection is this principle: that obedience must be preferred to every other act of virtue, however great and good it may be."

This reminds us of the answer made by Blessed Giles to one of the Brothers who, when called away by St. Francis of Assisi from prayer to go in quest of alms, complained bitterly of the interruption: "Brother, I see that you do not yet know what prayer really is, for there is no prayer so good and so perfect as this, that the Religious should do the will of his Superior."

St. Augustine also in his treatise, "De opere monachorum," says:"Ten thousand prayers said by a disobedient monk are not worth as much as one said by the monk who obeys."

Thus obedience is the universal rule of the Religious. This constitutes the third excellence of this virtue.

In some religious Orders only one vow is taken, or at least only one promise is made in the formula of profession, the vow of obedience. Why is this? Because it is evident that taking this vow answers to all that is essential to the practice of the life of perfection.

The Religious gives up his will; he is therefore no longer free to return to the world to enjoy its goods and its pleasures. From that time forth obedience regulates everything: his prayers, meals, work, occupations; his relations with others, solitude, the care given to the body, mortifications, etc. For all these there are fixed rules, and in fact the Religious who is careful to observe what is ordained for every hour of the day and of the night in the constitutions, the particular regulations, the usages

and customs of the Order or the House; the Religious who does this, I say, does not so much as make a single movement which is not decreed by this time-honored legislation; but above and beyond all the rules of general or individual application, there is one general, one universal law, the rule of obedience. By this all is ordained and determined, and as a last appeal the will of God is practically revealed, and in His will, as the Psalmist says, is true life. Obedience is the true, the sole motive and mainspring of every action of the Religious: the initial source, the infallible regulator of all he does, to which it also gives sanction and perfection. Ruffin relates that one day some monks went to visit an aged anchorite, and by their arrival obliged him to take his midday meal at an earlier hour than the regular one. Afterwards they asked him if it had not vexed him to break the prescribed fast. "Not in the least," he replied. "I am only sorry when I do my own will, for then I fear lest I should have pleased myself and thus lost the merit of my deed; but if I act under obedience I am certain, whatever I do, of gaining not a little merit, because obedience imparts a high value to all which it commands."

These last words disclose a fourth excellence which the virtue of obedience possesses: it raises ordinary actions to a very much higher level of merit.

In the second part of this book mention was made of St. Dositheus as a model of perfect obedience; so touching an example of this virtue may aptly be now recalled to mind.

Dositheus was a young man of noble birth. In spite of his frail and delicate health he embraced the monastic life. But his health was too weak to allow of his following the exercises of the Community; he could not rise early or keep late vigils, nor could he engage in manual labor. He spent five years in the infirmary, obliged to content himself with performing, as far as his strength permitted, the most menial offices and waiting upon any others who were

sick. But in doing all this he practised obedience in its greatest perfection; and on his death at an early age it was revealed to a holy monk that this frail and sickly young man had received the same reward as St. Paul and St. Antony. The other monks were greatly astonished when they heard this, and some seemed inclined to take exception at it; but their wise Abbot, speaking in God's name, told them that Dositheus owed this glory to the perfect manner in which he practised obedience. "Never," he said, "did he in anything do his own will; never did he allow himself to be guided by his own judgment."

And if it be asked how it is that obedience, even in the most trifling matters, can endow a Religious with so great a measure of merit, can raise him to so high a degree of glory, the answer is simple. God has need of nothing; He does not want great deeds on our part, grand projects or extraordinary penances, He only wants us to give Him glory. Now we glorify Him by our fidelity in accomplishing His good pleasure. If it is His will that we should perform the most ordinary work, as it was His will (mark this well) that His adorable Son should when at Nazareth, we glorify Him, we execute His good pleasure by doing that work. But what is the virtue which indicates to us what it is His good pleasure that we should do? It is obedience, none other than obedience. Happy the Religious who thoroughly understands and assents to this simple but sublime truth!

It is one with which the saints were all familiar. The examples afforded by their lives are innumerable. Let us take that of St. Bridget. In compliance with the behest of her Superior, she one day took a bath, although she felt the strongest disinclination for it. Afterwards Our Lord appeared to her and expressed His approval of her conduct, telling her that the lowest actions, even if agreeable to nature or perhaps to some extent partaking

of the nature of a fault, if done under obedience, acquire great value in His sight.

St. Francis of Sales relates the following trait in his own pleasing manner.

"St. Gertrude had taken the veil in a convent the Superior of which was well aware that the saint had a very weak and delicate constitution. On that account she had greater consideration shown to her than to the other Religious, and the Superior did not allow her to practise the austerities which were usual in that Order. What did Gertrude do in order to become a saint? Nothing else but submit quite simply to the will of the Mother Superior; and although in her fervor she would fain have done as the others did, yet she showed no sign of this, for when she was told to go to bed, she went at once, without questioning or objecting, knowing full well that she could enjoy the presence of her divine Spouse when lying on her bed in virtue of obedience, as she could if she had been in the choir with her fellow-Religious. And for the sake of making known the peace and tranquillity of heart she acquired by thus practising obedience, Our Lord vouchsafed to reveal to St. Mechtilde, a nun in the same convent, that if any one desired to find Him here below, He was to be sought first of all in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, and after that in the heart of Sister Gertrude."

The same saint says elsewhere: "The slightest action done in virtue of obedience is pleasing to God. If you take your meals under obedience, eating is on your part more pleasing to God than the fasts of the hermits, if in this they were a rule to themselves. Lay down to rest when this is enjoined upon you, and the repose you take will be more pleasing to God than work voluntarily undertaken."

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE NECESSITY OF THE VIRTUE OF OBEDIENCE.

That obedience is necessary, absolutely and indispensably necessary, to the well-being of Communities is an obvious and undeniable fact. Could a society hold together for a single day unless a spirit of subordination prevailed amongst its members? And when the society in question is one which is bound together by the interior bonds of the heart and of the mind far more than by any exterior relations, it is as clear as daylight that for the welfare, the real welfare of a society of that nature, obedience must be strictly enforced.

Poverty is the wealth of Communities, chastity is their glory, mutual charity is their happiness, while obedience imparts to them solidity, prosperity, life.

If the religious life is compared to a building, then obedience is the foundation on which its walls are raised, the cement that binds the stones together, in short all that forms it into a solid whole. This is said by the saints, in particular by St. Bonaventure, St. Teresa, and others.

If it be compared to the human body, obedience is what gives it health, vitality, energy, beauty, abundant strength, in a word it is the soul that informs and animates it.

If it be said to be a thing of great value, a treasure (and well it merits that title), obedience is its most pre-

cious, most costly portion, while at the same time it is the trustworthy guardian and invincible defender of that treasure.

If we say with St. Catharine of Sienna that it is a spiritual bark of which the Holy Spirit is the Master, and into which He admits souls who are desirous of attaining perfection, Obedience is the oarsman who propels that vessel over the waves, and the helmsman who holds the rudder and guides its course. Soon after the saint, mixing up the religious life and obedience, as if they were interchangeable terms, says: "Obedience is in itself a ship, a ship laden with rich treasures, and who sails in that bark over the ocean of time need have no anxiety as to anything he may want for his spiritual or temporal necessities, since those who are truly obedient and observe the Rule scrupulously are under the care of the Holy Spirit, the Captain of that ship."

Mère Emilie, whom we are never tired of quoting, because of her high attainments in the practice of virtue and the rare intelligence she displayed in all that concerns the religious life, makes use of the same comparison, borrowed from St. Catharine: "Obedience resembles a vessel which is secure against shipwreck though it sails amongst rocks and is tossed by tempests." She adds: "Obedience is the thermometer of the heart in respect to our love for God; it shows the greater or less amount of supernatural heat that warms it; it is the essential element of the religious life."

This is tantamount to saying that the religious state can not possibly exist, much less thrive, without obedience; so we may safely conclude that it is of the utmost necessity for religious Communities.

It is equally essential for each individual member of the Community, as we shall proceed to show. It is necessary for the novice, for the Religious who is tempted, for the

tepid and imperfect, as well as for those who are in earnest and generous in God's service, and also for the perfect.

1. Obedience is necessary for the novice. The saying of an ancient Father of the desert has been handed down to us: "Obedience is the principal, the only condition befitting the Religious." St. Bernard, writing to his sister, reminds her of this saying: Obedience must be your one thought and aim, for the sole object of the Religious; the constant posture of her mind ought to be the practice of obedience. Some old writers, employing a term which can no longer be used in the same sense, say that obedience is the only *trade* of the Religious. Now if obedience is the *trade* of the Religious, it is clear that the novice, who is an apprentice in this trade, must endeavor to attain proficiency in it during the period of his probation by constant exercise.

Fr. Lallemand, an eminent member of the Society of Jesus, well versed both in the theory and the practice of the religious virtues, made his novices take obedience for the subject of their particular examen for five or six consecutive months. "Do not grow weary of hearing me speak of obedience, my children," he would say. "If you can perfect yourselves in that virtue you may rest assured that you are in the right way to make your sanctification sure."

It is no easy task to tell all the benefits that obedience confers on the novice. He finds in her a mother, a nurse, a friend, a protectress, a powerful advocate.

She is his mother, because by her he was born into the true life of religion. She bears him in her womb during the time he is being formed in the novitiate, and gives him birth on the auspicious day of his profession.

She is his nurse, because nourished by the milk of her wise counsels and encouragement he grows and makes progress in the life which as his mother she gave him.

She is his friend; she consoles him when he is in trouble, strengthens him when he is tempted, raises him when he falls.

She is his protectress; she preserves him from many dangers arising from self-love, dejection, inconstancy, presumption, etc.

Finally she is his powerful advocate; for she it is who inclines the hearts of his Superiors toward him when he has done wrong. For whatever the misdeeds, the natural defects, the imperfections of a novice may be, his Superiors will always judge him leniently and form great hopes of him, if only he is sincerely obedient.

What a blessed thing obedience is then for the novice, exposed as he is to so many dangers and errors of judgment, and obliged to labor at the great work of his reformation!

Some one may perhaps say: All that is equally true of humility. It seems like a depreciation of humility to extol obedience in this way. Not so; the two virtues are but one; and we answer in the words of St. Catharine of Sienna: "Humility is the measure of obedience, and obedience is the measure of humility." Let us remember this saying and apply it to what follows.

2. Obedience is necessary to those who are tempted. It is necessary because of the irresistible power it possesses against every manner of temptation. Temptation is a conflict which the devil, the world, and the flesh wage against us. It is essential that at any cost we gain the victory, for our external salvation is at stake. But who will be our ablest ally in this desperate fight? Obedience, most plainly. Holy Scripture says expressly: "An obedient man shall speak of victory." *Vir obediens loquetur victoriam* (Prov. xxi. 28). These consoling words ought to be the constant subject of meditation for all Religious who are tormented by temptations in this land of exile.

The Fathers, commenting on another sentence from Holy Writ, The enemy hateth the sound of thy keeper, thus explain these somewhat obscure words: "The keeper of the Religious is his Superior; the sound of the keeper is the salutary advice he gives to enable the Religious to repel the assaults of the enemy." St. Dorotheus is more explicit. "Not only," he says, "do the counsels of the Superior terrify the enemy, who is the devil, but even the sound of his voice alarms him, and if the obedient monk determines to have recourse to his Superior, that suffices to put the demon to flight."

The same Father used to say that nothing pleases the devil more than to see Religious disobeying the orders of their Superiors. Those who do so are his favorites, for he can do with them whatever he chooses.

Not only is the devil defeated when obedience intervenes to resist him, but there is no better means of subduing the flesh and overcoming the world than this same virtue. How often is this exemplified in the lives of the saints. One reads of some who, tortured by distressing thoughts, were delivered from them as soon as they opened their heart to their Superior and were counseled by him. St. Magdalen of Pazzi found this the most efficacious method of getting rid of the painful and humiliating thoughts with which she was constantly beset.

When a soul makes progress in the way of perfection, other temptations assail her at every step, such as indiscreet zeal, an ill-regulated longing for what is really good in itself, a vehement desire to perform extraordinary penances, or a mental delusion of some kind or other. Now daily experience shows that the remedy for all these evils is purely and simply obedience. Here again, as always and everywhere, "the obedient man shall speak of victory."

3. Obedience is necessary for imperfect Religious.

There is no need to say much on this point. If they are desirous to get rid of their faults, let them abandon themselves to the guidance of their Superior and that will suffice. It is the unanimous opinion of the Fathers, writes Cassian, that no Religious can conquer any passion, be it anger, dejection, or carnal desires, nor can he acquire true humility of heart, mutual charity, and grace to persevere in the religious life, unless from the beginning he subjugates his will to that of his Superior.

4. Obedience is necessary for generous souls who advance resolutely in the way of perfection. The chief virtue of these souls, according to the most enlightened masters of the spiritual life, is discretion; that is to say, the supernatural interior disposition which induces the soul to observe the happy medium; not through culpable negligence to fail to correspond with grace, nor to go to the other extreme of exaggerated eagerness, presumption, and singularity. All writers on the spiritual life attach great importance to this virtue. We know that St. Antony extolled it and placed it above all others. Now it is to obedience that it owes this foremost rank and dignity, for without obedience discretion is really impossible, as the pious Gerson says, so that the discretion that befits the Religious is to place himself unreservedly at the discretion of his Superior.

Numerous examples might be adduced in confirmation of this truth. Amongst them we will select the following:

The Blessed Margaret Mary, at the outset of her religious life, sometimes gave free rein to her ardent longing for perfection, and it appears that the practices suggested by her fervor were not always regulated by obedience. Listen to her own words:

"Although the keen, clear-sighted vision of my divine Spouse discerns the least want of humility and charity,

and for these He administers a severe reproof, yet nothing is to be compared to any failure in obedience either to the Rule or to my Superiors; above all, the slightest sign of reluctance shown by a nun in answering her Superiors is intolerable to Him. 'Thou deceivest thyself,' He said to me, 'in thinking to please Me by these acts and these mortifications, rather than give up which, since they are chosen by thy own will, thou wouldst bend the will of thy Superior to thy will. Know that I spurn all those acts as fruits spoiled by self-will, which is abhorrent to one in a Religious; and I should be much more pleased to see her accept little comforts and indulgences through obedience than harden herself with fasts and austerities through her own will.' And if it happens that without His command or the orders of my Superior I perform of my own accord some mortification or penance, He does not permit me to offer them to Him, but rebukes and punishes me for them just as for any other faults, all of which will receive their due penalty in purgatory. Once, when I had finished taking the discipline, as I had been told to do, for the space of an *Ave Maris Stella*, Our Lord said to me: 'I have had my share'; and when I went on He said: 'Now thou art giving the devil his share,' and this made me stop instantly. Another time when I wished to go on longer than the time permitted for the souls in purgatory, they came around me and complained that the strokes of the discipline were falling on them. This made me resolve to die rather than exceed in the very least the limit fixed by obedience."

What an excellent lesson for those who, under the pretext of fervor and generosity, think to be their own guide in the way of perfection!

5. Finally, obedience is necessary for the perfect, that is to say, for souls who have become familiarized with the practices of the life of perfection, and who by means

of them have attained to union with God by charity; a life of union with Him which is in truth a foretaste and actual commencement of the life of the blessed. Those who have reached this state have vanquished the world, the devil, the flesh, and all unruly passions. After all these victories the soul seems to repose in God as in her center, and not unfrequently extraordinary favors and sublime gifts are granted in that state of sanctity to which God in His mercy has raised the soul.

But then, more than ever, obedience is necessary. Holy Scripture says: "The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things, and thou shall find grace before God" (Ecclus. iii. 20). Now the humiliation which is here said to be necessary for the soul consists principally in the practice of obedience.

We will again listen to the masters of the life of perfection, for they speak with true enlightenment, and their authority is unimpeachable.

St. Gregory, Pope, says: "An inferior must never feel confident concerning any doctrine which he believes that he has received from Heaven, even though it were taught him by God Himself, until his Superior has approved of that doctrine."

St. John of the Cross speaks yet more emphatically on this point, for on his part he says that if the inferior feels no inclination to communicate the teaching he has received in a supernatural manner to his Superior, it is a sure proof that it was an angel of darkness, not an angel of light, who spoke to him.

St. Vincent Ferrer also says: "Even supposing it to be true that your Superior is less enlightened than you are in spiritual matters, that is no reason for withdrawing from his direction, nor does it justify you in trusting to your own guidance. For, whatever your Superior may be, you need not fear that he will prove a hindrance to your progress

in perfection. He may err, but you can not err in obeying him."

This is why St. Teresa, whose spiritual knowledge was so extensive and so solid, used to say: "I may be deceived in regard to revelations, but I know I can not be deceived in obeying."

Enough has now been said on this interesting and important subject to prove to every Religious that however great his needs, however great the graces bestowed on him, obedience is indispensable to him.

O my beloved brothers and sisters, who are privileged to live under the rule of obedience, how sublime is the blessing, how signal the favor you enjoy! It is indeed a source of perpetual rejoicing, of perpetual delight to have been called to share in these celestial benefits.

Cultivate these sentiments of fervent, heartfelt thanksgiving, appreciate the happiness which is yours, and in order to augment it yet further, give your attention to what will now be said concerning the qualities of this wondrous virtue

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE QUALITIES OF THE VIRTUE OF OBEDIENCE.

THE Religious consecrated by his vows to the life of a victim, of a perfect victim of obedience, rejoices in the conviction that in every state and at every age obedience is for him an absolute necessity. In his eager longing for sacrifice and self-immolation, he thanks God for the consciousness that nothing in life or death, neither the most signal graces nor the most exalted employments, can avail to loosen the cords that bind him on the sacrificial altar; but that those graces, those dignities only furnish another reason for submission and self-surrender to the will of his Superiors. Therefore with fresh eagerness he now seeks to acquire a thorough knowledge of the qualities of obedience. This knowledge will stimulate him to a more perfect practice of that virtue, to greater fervor in his life of self-sacrifice; and this is his sole ambition.

Religious obedience has ten principal characteristics: it is simple, humble, indifferent, all-embracing, attentive, prompt, unreserved, cheerful, patient, and filial.

We will proceed to consider each of these characteristics severally.

1. Obedience is simple. In the thirteenth chapter of the second part we defined simplicity as implying unity, or oneness. Simplicity does in fact see God alone in everything; it has a single eye for His will, His good pleasure,

His interests, His glory. Simple obedience therefore is that which sees God alone in the Superior, God's will in the will of the Superior, and who fulfils that will for God's sake, for His glory and for His love; without looking to the right hand or to the left. Thus no criticizing, no comparing, no hesitation, no questioning as to the why and wherefore: God wills it; that is enough.

St. Gregory depicts this simple obedience in these words: "The truly obedient man is he who never thinks of examining the opinion or wishes of his Superior, or discussing the orders he receives, approving some and disapproving of others; who in all simplicity commits the guidance of his life to him who is in authority over him. His pleasure is to obey; and he thinks all that he is told to do is right; for he who has learned what true obedience is never thinks of using his own judgment."

Not only is the obedient Religious far from entertaining any wish that his Superior would tell him the reason why he orders this or that, but, on the contrary, he is never so happy as when he is merely informed what has to be done. He thinks obedience ought to be blind.

St. Aloysius used to say that to expect the Superior to expound his reasons would be equivalent to regarding him, not as God's representative, but as a clever, worldly-wise man, who was generally successful in persuading people to do what he wanted. All the saints delighted in this perfect subjugation of the mind and the judgment.

Thus obedience is simple.

2. Obedience is humble. If it is simple it will be humble; if it sees only God, His will, His good pleasure, it will submit in all humility. Besides, there is a close affinity between true obedience and humility. St. Ambrose said: Humility and obedience are one and the selfsame thing. They have a common cradle and a common tomb.

The first way in which humility helps obedience is by

causing the Religious to regard every order given by the Superior as wise and just, never unreasonable or onerous, however painful, difficult, and humiliating it may be. The example of St. Radegund will come in appositely here. Whilst Queen of France, she founded the convent of Sainte-Croix, near Poitiers. Before her death, she desired to taste the tranquil happiness of the life of perfection, and with that view presented herself as a suppliant for admission at the door of the house of which she was the Foundress. Now it happened that at that very time the Abbess was a person who had formerly been in the Queen's service. This made no difference to the royal postulant; she submitted like a slave to the orders of her Superior, without ever desiring the least exemption to be made on her behalf; and she cheerfully executed the orders she received, whatever they were, serving in the kitchen, washing the dishes, or waiting upon the nun who prepared the meals, carrying in to her all that she wanted.

In the second place, humility causes the truly obedient Religious to credit his Superior with all the good he is able to effect, without any reserve. In fact he sincerely believes that if he succeeds, his success is to be attributed not to his own merit, but to the virtue God gives to the prayers of him who is His representative. This admirable saying of an ancient hermit has been recorded: I asked him, the narrator states, in what sense one can say that in the virtue of obedience that of humility is also comprised. His answer was this: Let the obedient monk raise the dead, let him have the gift of tears, let the most violent assaults of our enemies be powerless against him, if only he is convinced that he has obtained these gifts and graces through the prayers of his spiritual Father, or this will act as a preservative against vainglory.

In the third place, humility has the effect of making the

Religious who is truly obedient love his state of subjection and dependence. Not for all the world would he abandon that state, wherein obscurity and forgetfulness of creatures come as a matter of course. Moreover he has a secret, deep-rooted aversion to offices and posts of authority. This feeling was shared by all the saints. St. Raymund of Pennafort, General of the Dominican Order, entreated his fellow-Religious continually to do him the favor of getting him deposed. "I assure you," he said to them, "that I would far rather obey the lowest lay-brother than govern the whole Order."

Finally, humility incites the truly obedient monk not only to obey his Superiors, but all the other members of the Community. This is a very perfect degree of obedience; we shall speak of it farther on, when we explain how obedience is all-embracing.

3. Obedience is indifferent. This characteristic is the natural result of the act by which the true Religious made himself a victim in God's sight, placing himself in the hands of his Superior. He has given up everything. His will is dead, or rather he no longer holds sway over it, and this being so, there is nothing for which he is not prepared. This St. Bernard observes: He who is really obedient, he says, surrenders all his wishes and aversions, so that he can say: "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready," ready to do all that Thou willest, ready to obey the slightest sign, to obey instantly and promptly; ready to apply myself to Thy divine service, ready to serve my brethren, ready to attend to my own needs, and ready to rest in Thy presence and contemplate the beauty of Thy celestial kingdom.

St. Jane Chantal trained her spiritual daughters to this complete indifference, and she bears witness to their proficiency in it: If I wanted to send them to heaven, they would offer to climb up thither, and if I wanted them to go

into the bowels of the earth, they would immediately seek a means of descent.

One of those who entered most fully into the teaching of the Foundress of the Visitation, B. Margaret Mary, thus depicts the model nun: A good nun ought to belong wholly to God and to her Superior, so that the Superior can dispose of her and employ her at pleasure; to live in entire abandonment to divine Providence and holy obedience, wishing for nothing and refusing nothing, but holding herself in constant readiness to do all and suffer all without a murmur. Such is the true paradise of the Religious.

The first manner in which the Religious shows indifference in his obedience is by never thinking that enough has been laid upon him. It may so happen that the Superior gives such a number of orders that it seems impossible for one person to execute them all; he may appoint us to several offices and load us with charges, so that at first sight it would appear as if we could not get through all the work. We think we have neither the strength, nor the time, nor the aptitude for so many tasks. Yet humility, simplicity, supernatural resignation will come to our aid, and that which it seemed impossible for us to accomplish will be done without too great a strain on our powers, or even achieved with ease.

The second sign of indifference in our obedience is never to appear hurried or agitated, but always equable and serene. This indifference is the result of simplicity. Obedience only acts for God; in everything it sees God alone. It dreads neither blame nor punishment, at least with no human fear, nor does it desire praise. If it acts quickly it is because love inspires this zeal; but the interior posture of the soul is calm and peaceful.

Another sign of indifference in religious obedience is that it inclines the Religious to conceal his likes and dislikes,

lest they should be gratified; he is very scrupulous in this respect, because the Superior, in the kindness of his heart, only wishes to give his subjects some little pleasure, and thus render the yoke of the Rule more light and easy. Besides the Superiors themselves, who find it very difficult to grant all requests, are much relieved when they perceive that their subjects endeavor to suppress any special liking for this or that act, for this or that employment. This simple and sincere indifference greatly facilitates the direction and administration of Houses; and on this account we believe it to be a source of special benediction for the Religious, since the relief afforded to the Superiors is most pleasing to the heart of our divine Master.

4. Obedience is all-embracing. (1) Obedience is all-embracing as far as persons are concerned. Doubtless a distinction must be made between a superior and an inferior ruler, between one who holds supreme sway, and one who is invested with partial authority; but in regard to the simplicity, the sincerity, the interior humility whereby he is actuated, the Religious knows no difference. In fact he would rather prefer to obey one who was in a lower position than obey the Head, because in that case his obedience would be more supernatural, and less liable to be influenced by human motives.

Thus the Religious who has the true spirit of obedience loves to obey those who are beneath him, at least for the sake of humility, if no obligation is laid upon him. The old Fathers used frequently to remind their juniors of St. Paul's maxim: "By the charity of the spirit serve one another" (Gal. v. 13). In the Rule of St. Pachomius, dictated by an angel, this exhortation is inserted: If one of two Brothers who are on a journey together, sees a spring of water, and, parched with thirst, drinks a draught from the spring without having previously asked his companion's permission, even though that companion

be younger then himself, he does wrong in drinking without the blessing that might have been his.

(2) Obedience is all-embracing in regard to commands; it knows neither restriction nor exception. St. Thomas says that this universal application is based on the vow itself. Thus it is prepared for anything and everything, and when the time comes to execute a behest of any kind, obedience receives it with docility and promptitude.

(3) Obedience is all-embracing as to time and place. It may appear that the novitiate is more than any other the time when obedience is to be practised. But the Religious who is truly obedient is just as ready and willing to obey when he is old as he was when first he embraced the religious state. Like Our Lord, "He became obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 8). In the times of consolation or aridity, in health or sickness; when he feels the need of rest, or when he longs to enjoy solitude, he invariably obeys; obedience is his chief, his only Rule.

Thus the Religious obeys always and everywhere: in the choir, in his cell, in the refectory, at recreation, at work, in the infirmary, in the monastery to which he belongs, in that to which he is sent, when traveling with his fellow-monk, or when alone on a mission. He would rather, following Our Lord's example, lose his life than depart from obedience.

What yet remains to be said will make this truth all the more apparent.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE QUALITIES OF THE VIRTUE OF OBEDIENCE (CONTINUED).

5. Religious obedience is unreserved. This fifth characteristic of obedience deserves special attention, because it is a quality indispensable to the perfection of every sacrifice. When our adorable Victim came into the world He said to His Father: "Behold I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. x. 9). And at a later period He bears witness to Himself, that He had fulfilled that divine will to the least jot and tittle.

The entirety of the sacrifice was so indispensable a condition under the Old Law that we read that God punished the high priest Heli with great severity because he allowed his sons to reserve for themselves a portion of the sacrifices that were offered in the Temple. In a treatise on "The Art of Obeying," Père Modeste de St. Aimable, of the Order of Mount Carmel, makes the following remarks.

Obedience makes us God's victims, since it sacrifices us to His honor and His service; but Religious ought to be very careful to offer an entire sacrifice, reserving no part of the burnt-offering; there are some who give up physical comforts, but do not give up their own will; others give up their will, but not their own judgment; they think that it is not advisable to do what the Superior commands in the way he commands, that they could do it much better in another manner, or that it would be far wiser to do the

contrary; others there are who execute the orders given them to the letter, but do not observe the circumstances implied in the command. They add to or take away from it according to their own fancy; all this is not offering a whole oblation, it is retaining some portion of the victim. What can one expect from these divided offerings but that they should call down the wrath of God, seeing that to give creatures a share in the sacrifice is placing them on an equality with Him? The infinite majesty of God requires that the victim offered should be whole and entire, He rejects those of which any portion is held back.

This perfect entirety of the sacrifice consists in nothing more or less than the punctual, precise accomplishment to the very least iota of the command laid upon us. A Religious who is inclined to cavil might sometimes find some drawbacks to this humble and perfect fidelity, this rigorous exactitude, whereas the fervent Religious only sees in it what is desirable, the perfection of the spirit of self-surrender, in which alone he desires to live.

6. Religious obedience is attentive. Since we are treating of sacrifice, that is to say of an act appertaining to our religious vocation, the service of God, attention of heart and mind is indispensable. The truly obedient Religious is attentive in order to understand aright the will of his Superior, to grasp its bearing, to remember every detail of it and to fulfil it faithfully with scrupulous care. In this view he gives his whole attention to it simply and intently, lest he should forget any part of it; in fact some zealous Religious have been seen to make a note of the orders they received, remembering that under the Old Law, the Lord God, alluding to His commandments, said: "Keep My law as the apple of thy eye; bind it upon thy fingers, write it upon the tables of thy heart" (Prov. vii. 2, 3).

7. Religious obedience is prompt. St. Bernard thus

speaks of it: One who is truly obedient never hesitates, dilatoriness is unknown to him, he will not hear of putting anything off until the morrow, he abhors postponement. His eyes are always on the watch to see, his ears to hear, his tongue to speak, his hands to work, his feet to run in execution of the command of his Superior; he summons all his faculties in order to accomplish the will of his Superior as perfectly as possible.

In this frame of mind the obedient Religious cares for nothing to which obedience does not call him; he concentrates his whole attention on what obedience prescribes, and executes it with the utmost eagerness. Prompt obedience is distinguished by the following characteristics:

(1) It may be known by this, if the Religious hastens to leave whatever he is doing, even what he is doing with the greatest application and pleasure, in order to fulfil the commands of his Superior without an instant's delay. Mark, a disciple of St. Sylvanus, acted thus to the great edification of the monks of the desert. On one occasion, when busily employed in writing in his cell, on hearing his Superior call him, he laid down his pen without so much as finishing, not a word, but a letter (the letter o) which he was in the act of forming.

St. John Climacus, alluding to a monastery in Egypt which he had visited, said how touching a sight it was, one which inspired him with respect and admiration, to see old men, whose gray hair entitled them to reverence, running like children to learn their Superior's orders, and seeking no distinction but that of obedience and humility.

In like manner one has met with generous souls who have sacrificed the spiritual consolations they valued most, mental prayer, holy Mass, holy communion, at the mere wish of their Superior. B. Marie de l'Incarnation, who was of great assistance in introducing the Carmelite nuns into France, even before her entrance into

religion (where she insisted on remaining a lay Sister), was most scrupulous in her obedience to her husband, M. Acarie, whatever it cost her; for if he happened to send for her when she was hearing Mass, or on the point of approaching the holy table, she would immediately leave the church and postpone the happiness of receiving her God until some later hour, or even until another day. What an example for nuns!

(2) The obedience of the Religious is seen to be prompt if he anticipates the orders of his Superior, executing them before they are actually formulated into words. The truly obedient Religious, St. Bonaventure declares, does not wait for his Superior to speak; it is enough that if he knows his will, he hastens to accomplish it.

(3) The Religious gives proof of prompt obedience if he divines the wishes of his Superior and executes them. Sometimes, in fact, it happens that the Superior, out of consideration for the age and the former services of a monk, deems it more prudent not to appoint him positively to some post. If the inferior surmise this, he is bound to offer his services to his Superior and place himself at his disposal.

(4) Finally, the Religious gives proof of prompt obedience by the simplicity and exactitude wherewith he individually carries out the behests addressed to the whole Community in a general way. A Superior may have good reasons sometimes for acting thus. For instance, he may say: "One of you must go into the kitchen to help wash the dishes, etc." If a perfect spirit of obedience prevails in that House all the Religious will vie with one another in their eagerness and willingness to undertake the work. It is an edifying sight to be seen in fervent Communities. St. Margaret of Hungary is said to have been most exemplary in prompt and cheerful obedience.

8. Religious obedience is cheerful. A holy joy is a note

of perfection in an oblation. Solomon says of himself: "In the simplicity of my heart I have joyfully offered all these things" (I. Par. xxix. 17); and St. Paul declares that "God loveth a cheerful giver" (II. Cor. ix. 7). An act of obedience is something given to God; in taking the vow we gave the tree, now by each individual act of obedience we give the fruit of the tree, and would our offering be acceptable if it were presented grudgingly?

St. Bernard says that the joyousness of obedience is what color is to a picture, giving it beauty and brilliance. Every one will see the aptness of this illustration. Let us therefore make our sacrifices with interior delight and exterior cheerfulness and serenity, and thus give glory to God and satisfaction to our Superiors.

9. Religious obedience is patient. Patience is indeed necessary, for our proud, rebellious nature is slow to bend beneath the yoke of obedience. Sometimes one meets with Religious who have been twenty or thirty years in religion, and who yet find it hard to obey. This opposition which we feel, proceeding from the evil within us, is not sinful; the only sin is to allow it to conquer us. But great patience is needed to overcome in this struggle.

It is more especially needed if it should please God to try us by giving us a Superior whose character and mind are utterly different from our own. It is still more needed if the command given is stern, and the order difficult of execution.

Thus St. Bernard says prompt and perfect obedience argues no little courage, and it can only become habitual in a soul who has resolutely freed herself from all worldly considerations. In the first part of this book we have seen that Thomas à Kempis, in his instructions to novices on the duties of the religious life, compares the courage required for perfect obedience to the courage and constancy of the martyrs.

10. Religious obedience is filial. This last quality or characteristic of religious obedience is the most pleasing and attractive of all, and the source of an infinite amount of consolation. In all religious Houses the Superior is called the Father, or, in Communities of women, the Mother Superior. The old titles of Abbot and Abbess had the same meaning. And this is as it should be; every Superior is the representative of God, and God is our Father. "You have not," says St. Paul, "received the spirit of bondage again in fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry Abba, Father" (Rom. viii. 15). Thus we are in all truth the children of God. St. John says: "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called and should be, the sons of God" (I. John iii. 1). Now if God is our Father, and this attribute of paternity is the principal feature of His relationship to us, the Superior who represents Him is in the position of a father toward us, and we are his children. He ought to know the duties this title of Father lays upon him; we know the nature of the obedience we owe him as his children. Our obedience ought to be filial, and this in two ways:

(1) Filial obedience should induce us to open our heart to the Superior in all humility. There is nothing contrary to perfect obedience for a subject simply and humbly to tell his Superior of some thought that arose in his mind in regard to some order given to him, the difficulties and disagreeable trials involved in its execution. Superiors are well aware that they are not infallible, and they are glad when these simple, childlike confessions are made to them. Let not the Religious shrink from thus speaking his mind to his Superior, but if after he has done so quite frankly the Superior still insists on the command being carried out, then it behooves him, if he is truly obedi-

ent, to give way like a docile child and execute the order, however great the sacrifice it may cost him.

(2) Obedience shows itself to be filial if the command is obeyed with full confidence that God's blessing always accompanies the orders issued by the Superior.

Let us therefore be persuaded that when difficulties arise which seem to afford an insuperable obstacle to the accomplishment of the orders we have received we shall find in obedience a special grace which will enable us to surmount them. This grace will never fail us. Before commencing our task we had not this grace; but when our Father who is in heaven had spoken by the lips of our visible Father, a supernatural and effectual assistance accompanied his words, and a celestial benediction descended upon us. Remember this: it is no exaggeration to say that the command of the Superior resembles a sacrament, inasmuch as it communicates a grace to us, the grace we need to enable us to accomplish what is enjoined upon us.

Filial confidence will lead us to tell our spiritual Father in a humble manner what we like best and can do best, not with an eye to inducing him to give us one particular office rather than another, for that would be a very imperfect and hypocritical act, but because it is meet that nothing should be concealed from him whom we call our Father.

Such are the principal qualities of religious obedience. But the subject is not yet exhausted. The following chapter is only a continuation of what has just been said.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE SUPERNATURAL RESPECT WHICH THE RELIGIOUS OWES TO HIS SUPERIORS.

Possibly many of the ideas expressed in this chapter and the acts enjoined on the Religious may at first sight appear peculiar and exaggerated to some minds. God grant that so unfortunate an impression may not be made on any of my readers, for to take exception at what is said can not be considered as a sign that grace has already set up its kingdom in their hearts. But alas! we live in an age in which the virtue of obedience finds little appreciation, and few who practice it. The spirit of insubordination pervades the moral atmosphere; even the best amongst us are more or less infected by it, and unconsciously to themselves they share in the general love of independence of which we see the bitter fruits in society at large, in domestic life, and even in religion. It is a terrible evil, and unless God is pleased in His mercy to deliver us from this scourge, who can foretell the future fate of modern society, given up as it is to the spirit of Satan?

Let Religious, however, at least resist the inroads of this modern tendency. Let holy and divine obedience, expelled from the world, find a sure refuge in the cloister, where the grand and immutable principles of faith will keep this sacred deposit intact. These principles, enabling the soul to rise superior to the baneful influences of the

world, will give her power to practise the evangelical virtues with zeal and fervor, to practise them in an heroic degree. Would that this heroism might become the ordinary, the daily practice in these sanctuaries in which Our Lord loves to dwell. Faith alone can operate this miracle.

Observe that when St. Paul in his epistles addresses servants and exhorts them to obedience and respect toward their masters, he invariably appeals to the sublime principles of faith in urging them to fulfil their duties. "Servants," he says, "be obedient to them that are your lords according to the flesh with fear and trembling, in the simplicity of your heart, as to Christ; . . . doing the will of God from the heart, with a good will serving, as to the Lord and not to men" (Eph. vi. 5). If St. Paul used language such as this in speaking to mere neophytes, recent converts from paganism, how forcibly he would have applied the same arguments in addressing Religious.

Thus taught by the great Apostle, let us be on our guard against the illusions and delusions of the age, and frequently ask ourselves how our sacred duties can be most perfectly performed.

In this chapter we intend to speak of the supernatural respect due to Superiors. Now this sentiment of respect will induce the fervent Religious to feel and act as follows.

1. He will conceive a high opinion of the virtue and merit of his Superior.

St. Bernard asserts that there are two kinds of obedience, obedience of the body and obedience of the heart. For it is not enough to yield exterior obedience to the orders of the Superior, unless in our inmost heart we cherish a high esteem for the giver of the command. Hence it follows that one ought never to allow one's mind to dwell on the faults of a Superior, and if they force themselves on our notice, the thought must be banished immediately by

recalling one of the virtues to be admired in him. St. Laurence Justinian goes yet further: he would have the Religious consider that there is no one more holy, more fit to direct him than his lawful Superior. The old Fathers used to quote this saying of St. John Climacus: "When we have provoked God to anger, our Superior by his prayers will reconcile us to Him; but if we offend our Superior, we shall have no one to plead our cause with the Most High."

The spirit of faith inspires the Religious with these lofty and salutary thoughts.

2. It will lead him to inspire the other members of the Community with a similar respect and esteem.

To do this is to perform a work which is most pleasing to the Heart of Jesus. Just as irreverent acts and speeches are most abhorrent to Him, so, on the other hand, He delights to see His children, the souls consecrated to Him, animated by that zeal for supernatural obedience and respect which makes them exert themselves in order to uphold and increase these virtues in the mind and heart of their fellow-Religious. It is related of the Ven. Mother Anne de Jesus, an illustrious daughter of St. Teresa, that she habitually enjoyed a close union with God, and innumerable were the graces she obtained through this mystic intercourse. Now one day she found herself deprived of all those graces and privileges; her soul was a prey to aridity, desolation, darkness, and distress. Earnestly and diligently she sought to discover the cause of this lamentable change, and it occurred to her that she had heard some one that very day speak in a depreciating manner of her Superior without giving any sign of displeasure, at which God, who is jealous of His rights, punished her for her lack of loyal fidelity. To be wanting in the respect due to Superiors is to wound Him in His most sensitive point.

Let us hold such an offence in abhorrence. It is the abomination of desolation in the holy place. It appears almost incredible, yet there are Religious who seem unfriendly and always dissent from the others, but if it is a question of speaking against the Superior all differences are dropped, they are all of the same mind. How plainly one sees the work of the malignant foe in this! Would that Religious who are desirous of drawing down the blessing of God upon their monastery were firmly resolved to extirpate so dangerous a tendency from their midst!

3. Not content with averting blame from his Superior and all which that Superior does, the Religious will allow himself to be blamed by others in order to shield his Superior.

Let us put a supposed case. It may so happen, for instance, that the Superior gives one of his subjects orders which have disastrous consequences. The imperfect Religious who is at fault in the matter is sure to say, on being reproved, that he only did what he was told to do, thus exculpating himself at the expense of his Superior. To do so is a grave act of infidelity to the grace of obedience. The loyal Religious, on the contrary, keeps silence; he takes upon himself the blame attaching to the failure and thus spares the credit of his Superior. In thus acting he is stimulated by two motives, common sense and faith; common sense tells him that the good of the many must be preferred to that of the individual, while the spirit of faith reminds him that to a certain extent the divine honor is impugned, when those who are God's representatives are put in the wrong. Did not Our Lord say: "He that despiseth you, despiseth Me"?

It is indeed important for Religious who wish to retain the favor of God to beware of falling into so grave a fault.

4. He will avoid every approach to disputing with his Superior, not only about the orders given him, which

would be an infraction of the rule of obedience, but on any subject whatsoever, out of respect for his authority.

Authors who have treated the question of disputes have spoken very strongly, and in this they were right. The following maxim is attributed to the heathen philosopher, Seneca: "To dispute with one's equal is a questionable thing to do; with an inferior, it is disgraceful; with a superior it is the act of a madman." St. Bonaventure used to tell his novices that disputes of this nature were equally indecorous and disrespectful. What in fact is the source whence dissensions spring? Is it not self-conceit, self-love, pride of heart? Now these feelings are evil and always to be condemned; but when they induce a Religious to set himself up in opposition to one whom he ought to look upon as God's representative, such an act of presumption merits the severest reprobation on the part of every one who has any idea of the duties of the religious state.

How praiseworthy, on the contrary, is the conduct of the Religious who enters with all simplicity into the wishes of his Superior. He may not perhaps approve of all, but he modestly holds his peace. If his opinion is asked, he gives it. And if this opinion is at variance with that of his Superior, it is nevertheless so modestly expressed, his tone and manner are so unassuming, as to leave no doubt that he is ready to submit to the Superior from whom he differs. Thus his behavior neither gives scandal to his brethren nor is it prejudicial to those in authority, but rather it is a source of general edification.

5. He will show great reverence for all that comes from the hand of his Superior, and for anything appertaining to him. St. Francis Xavier always read the letters he received from St. Ignatius on his knees, after humbly asking of God grace to fulfil faithfully the commands those missives might contain. St. Maurus had so great a respect

for his illustrious Father, St. Benedict, that he desired the letters he had received from him might be buried with him. It is related of the Ven. Mother Agnes of Jesus, a Carmelite nun, that she would never consent to sit upon the chair on which her Superior had been sitting. We could mention a Community in which a kind of perpetuity was given to this pious idea. Ever since the death of their venerated Foundress, no one has occupied her stall in the choir. It has not remained vacant, however, for her loving daughters have placed a statue of the Blessed Virgin on the spot where their departed abbess used to sit.

I have noticed, says a spiritual writer, that some amongst us, men of eminent virtue and specially remarkable for their obedience, never pass their Superior's room without raising their biretta, whether he was there or not, as a mark of the respect they felt for all that was connected with him. A Religious who is really worthy of the name, does not merely revere the person, the actions of his Superior: he considers everything about him to be in a certain way hallowed.

6. He will endeavor as far as he can to relieve his Superior of all work and trouble. We refer to exterior work and mental worries. Exterior work is a mark of servitude; besides, the head of a house has so many different things to attend to, that it is only just to do all one can to relieve him of the burden of administration. In every respect it is an act of filial piety to do one's utmost to help him. St. Bonaventure earnestly exhorted his novices to do so.

It is yet more praiseworthy if the Religious exerts himself to spare his Superior the vexations and grief inseparable from the government of a Community, by his good conduct, his fervor, punctuality, obedience, and proficiency in all other virtues of the religious state. For the greatest consolation of those who are in authority is to see their

subordinates turning to good account the grace of their vocation. St. Prosper frequently reminded his spiritual children of this. "You know," he said to them, "that if a load is carried by several people, the weight borne by each is greatly diminished. Help me therefore to bear the heavy burden that rests on my shoulders; you can do this by the practice of virtue, for the virtues or the faults of their subjects alleviate or aggravate the burden of those who are in authority."

7. He will not willingly suffer his Superior to render him any menial or painful service. The humble and obedient Religious can not bear, out of respect for the sacred office of his Superior, to see him humiliating himself. St. Peter showed this reluctance, when Our Lord was about to wash his feet. The divine Master insisted, and the humble apostle yielded; but who can be otherwise than touched by his previous resistance, prompted as it was by respect? We do not read that Judas offered any such opposition; perhaps the unhappy apostate felt a secret pleasure in seeing his Lord and Master kneeling at his feet. A depraved heart is capable of any wickedness; a good and pious heart feels hurt by everything that humiliates one whom he loves. Now a fervent Religious ought to love his Superior more than any one else.

8. Finally, the Religious will receive with love and gratitude all reprimands on the part of the Superior, regarding them as a proof of the interest he takes in him. On this point St. Basil remarks very justly: "Look," he says, "at those who have bodily ailments: they consider the physician to be their benefactor, though he causes them acute pain by his operating knife, or administers nauseous drugs; and should we not feel similar love and gratitude toward the physicians of our souls, although, in the hope of curing us and restoring us to health, they make our life burdensome to us?"

It is as a recognition of the important service rendered to him when he is reproved, and to show his gratitude for the reproof, that the Religious is required, in most orders, to receive the rebuke of his Superior on his knees. But this act of humility must proceed from a spirit of faith, not from habit, nor from a desire to appear to take the correction humbly and thus gain the admiration of others, for that would be hypocrisy on his part; he must assume that lowly posture in all sincerity of heart, in a penitential spirit, and feeling that a kindness is being shown him.

Such are the sentiments of those who are truly obedient.

We will not say more on the subject of obedience, not indeed because the theme is exhausted, but because we have reached the limits allotted us in the present work. For generous souls enough has already been said; happy those who have taken literally the instructions and counsels contained in the last chapters of this third part. For them, we doubt not, the religious life will be all that the divine bounty of God destines it to be for His chosen souls; light, strength, peace, true solace in this valley of tears, a sure pledge of predestination, a foretaste of heaven.

A LETTER OF ST. IGNATIUS ON OBEDIENCE, IN WHICH THE MOTIVES FOR THIS VIRTUE ARE SET FORTH, AND ALSO THE THREE DEGREES OF PERFECTION TO BE ATTAINED IN IT.[1]

1. It is a source of great comfort to me, most dear brethren in Christ, when I hear it reported with how earnest desire and endeavor you strive to attain to the highest perfection of all virtue and piety, by His favor, who as He has called you to this kind of life, so in His

[1] This letter, which is not generally known, epitomizes and completes what has been said on obedience. It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader with what great authority the saint speaks.

mercy keeps you in the same, and directs you to that blessed end whereunto those that are chosen by Him do arrive.

2. And truly, though I wish you to be perfect in all spiritual gifts and ornaments, yet especially do I desire (as you have understood of me heretofore) to see you most eminent in the Virtue of Obedience; and this not only for the excellent and singular fruits thereof, which are proved by many testimonies of Holy Writ, and by examples both in the Old and the New Testaments; but also because, as St. Gregory says, "Obedience is the only virtue that plants all other virtues in the mind, and preserves them after they are once planted."[1] As long as this virtue flourishes, all others doubtless will flourish, and bring forth such fruits as I desire in your hearts, and He with good reason requires, who by His salutary Obedience restored mankind when afflicted and destroyed through the crime of disobedience, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.[2]

3. More easily may we suffer ourselves to be surpassed by other religious Orders in fasting, watching, and other austerities in food and clothing, which each according to its own Institute and Rule holily adopts; but in true and perfect Obedience and abnegation of will and judgment, I greatly desire, dear brethren, that all those who serve God in this Society should be conspicuous, and that the true and genuine progeny of the same should as it were be distinguished by this mark, that they regard not the individual whom they obey, but in him Christ our Lord, for whose sake they obey. For the Superior is not to be obeyed because he is prudent, or virtuous, or adorned with any other divine gift whatsoever; but for this only, that he is the vicegerent of God, and has

[1] L. 35, Moral. ch. 10. [2] Philipp. ii. 8.

authority from Him who says, "He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me."[1] Neither, on the other hand, if he be of less understanding or prudence, is he for that reason to be the less obeyed, in that wherein he is Superior; since he represents His person whose wisdom can not be deceived, and who will supply whatever is wanting in His minister, whether it be virtue or other qualifications. Wherefore Christ our Lord, when He had said in express terms, "Upon the Chair of Moses have sitten the Scribes and Pharisees;" presently added, "all things therefore whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do; but according to their works, do ye not."[2]

4. Wherefore I desire that you should earnestly endeavor, with all care and diligence, to acknowledge Christ in every Superior, and with great devotion reverence and obey in him the divine Majesty. This will seem to you less strange, if you consider how the Apostle St. Paul commands us to obey even secular Superiors and Gentiles as Christ Himself, from whom all well-ordered authority is derived: for thus he writes to the Ephesians: "Be obedient to them that are your temporal lords according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the simplicity of your heart, as to Christ; not serving to the eye, as it were pleasing men, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with a good-will serving as to the Lord and not to men."[3] And from this you yourselves may judge of what account in his heart a religious man ought to make his Superior, to whom he has given himself to be ruled and governed, not only as to a Superior, but expressly as to one that holds the place of Christ: —whether he should look on him as man, or as the Vicar of Christ.

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[1] Luke x. 16. [2] Matt. xxiii. 2. [3] Eph. vi. 5.

5. Moreover, I desire that this should be thoroughly understood and deeply rooted in your minds, that it is but a very low and imperfect kind of Obedience which consists in the external execution only of what is commanded; and that it is not worthy of the name of virtue, unless it pass to a further degree, making the will of the Superior our will, and so agreeing with the same, that not only is there external fulfilment of the command, but also agreement of will; that so both may be of one mind in willing and not willing the same thing. And for this reason it is said in Holy Writ, "Obedience is better than sacrifices." [1] For, as St. Gregory teaches us, "In victims the flesh of another, but in obedience our own will is killed." [2] And because this part of the soul is so excellent, hence it is that the offering of it to Our Lord and Creator, through Obedience, is to be highly valued.

6. Oh! in how great and dangerous an error are not only they involved, who in things appertaining to flesh and blood, but such also as in things otherwise very holy and spiritual, as fasting, prayer, or other good works, think it lawful to swerve from the will and appointment of their Superior: let them give ear to what Cassian wisely remarks, in the Conference of Daniel the Abbot, saying, "It is one and the selfsame kind of disobedience, whether through eagerness to work, or desire of ease, one breaks the command of the Superior, and as prejudicial to go against the statutes of the Monastery out of sloth as out of watchfulness; and finally it is as bad to transgress the precept of the Abbot to read, as to contemn it to sleep." Holy was the activity of Martha, holy the contemplation of Mary Magdalene, and holy the penitence and tears wherewith she watered the feet of Christ our Lord: but all this had to be done in Bethania, which word is interpreted the

[1] I. Kings xv. 22.

[2] L. 35, Moral. ch. 10.

house of Obedience, whereby Our Lord would signify to us as St. Bernard says: "that neither devotedness to good works, nor the quiet of holy contemplation, nor the tears of the penitent, could have been pleasing to Him outside Bethania." [1]

7. Wherefore, dear Brethren, lay aside wholly, as far as you can, your own wills: hand over freely and dedicate to your Creator in His ministers the freedom He Himself has bestowed upon you. Consider it no small advantage of your free-will, that you are able to give it back fully, through Obedience, to Him from whom you received it. And by so doing, you not only do not lose, but rather increase and perfect it: since by this means you direct all your wills, by that most certain rule of rectitude, the will of God interpreted to you by him who governs you in the place of God.

8. And so you must be very careful never to seek to wrest the Superior's will (which you ought to hold for the will of God Himself) to your own: for this would be, not to conform your will to God's, but to endeavor to rule His will by yours, inverting the order of His divine wisdom. Oh! how great the error is, of those whom self-love has blinded, to fancy they are obedient, when by some means or other they have brought the Superior to that which they desire. Listen to St. Bernard, a man eminently experienced in this matter: "Whosoever," says he, "endeavors either openly or covertly to have his spiritual Father enjoin him what he himself desires, he deceives himself if he flatters himself he is a true follower of obedience: for in that matter he does not obey his Superior, but rather his Superior obeys him." [2] It follows, therefore, that whoever is desirous of reaching the virtue of Obedience, should rise to this second degree of Obedience,

[1] Serm. ad Milit. Templ. ch. 13. [2] Serm. de trib. Ordin. Eccl.

and not merely fulfil the Superior's command, but also make the Superior's will his own, or rather put off his own will, that he may put on the will of God, declared to him by his Superior.

9. But he who wishes to sacrifice himself wholly to God, besides his will must also offer up his understanding (which is the third and highest degree of obedience), and not only have the same will, but also the same opinion as his Superior; and submit his own judgment to his, as far as a devout will can bend the understanding. For though this power of the soul is not endowed with that freedom which gives the will its strength, and is naturally drawn to assent to whatever is represented to it as true, yet, nevertheless, in many things, where the evidence of known truth does not force it, it may by the strength of the will be inclined more one way than another. When this happens, whoever makes profession of Obedience ought to lean toward the judgment of the Superior. For Obedience being a holocaust, in which the whole man, absolutely without reserve, is offered up to his Creator and Lord in the fire of charity, through the hands of His ministers, and as it is also a thorough renunciation by which a religious man of his own accord abandons all his own rights, and devotes and formally transfers himself to God, to be possessed and governed by divine Providence through the guidance of his Superior; it can not be denied that Obedience comprises not only execution, by which a man does what is commanded, and the will, by which he does it willingly, but also the judgment, so that whatever the Superior commands and thinks good, seems just and reasonable to the inferior, so far, as I have said, as the will can by its force bend the understanding.

10. Would that this obedience of mind and judgment were as well understood and practised by men, as it is pleasing to God, and necessary for all who live in religion!

For, as in celestial bodies and globes, to the end that one may influence and move another, it is necessary that with a certain adaptation and order the inferior globe be subject to the superior; so amongst men, when one is moved by another's authority (as happens in Obedience), it is necessary that he who depends upon another be submissive and compliant, to the end that he may derive his effectiveness from him who commands. Now this system of submissiveness and compliance can not last unless the will and judgment of the inferior agree with the will and judgment of the Superior.

11. Moreover, if we regard the final cause of Obedience, as our will, so also our judgment may be deceived as to what is good for us; wherefore if, lest our will should stray, we conform it to the will of the Superior, our understanding is also to be conformed to his, in order that it may not be deceived: "Lean not upon thy own prudence,"[1] says the Holy Scripture. And even in worldly affairs, those who are wise judge it to be the part of a truly prudent man not to trust his own wisdom at all, especially in his own cause, in which, when the mind is troubled, one can hardly be a good judge. And if in our own affairs we are to prefer the judgment and advice of another, even when not our Superior, before our own; how much more the advice and judgment of the Superior, to whom we have handed over the direction of ourselves as to one who is God's vicegerent, and interpreter of the divine will! And undoubtedly in the case of spiritual persons the greater cautiousness is necessary, as the danger of the spiritual path is greater, when one runs along it without the bridle of discreet advice. A subject on which Cassian, in the conference of Abbot Moses, says, much to our purpose: "By no other vice does the devil drag a monk

[1] Prov. iii. 5.

headlong, and bring him to death sooner, than by persuading him to neglect the advice of the Elders, and trust to his own judgment and determination."[1]

12. Besides, unless we have this Obedience of the understanding, it is impossible that either the consent of our will, or execution, will be such as they ought to be: for nature itself has so ordained, that the appetites of the soul must follow its perceptions, and the will, without using violence, can not long obey in spite of the judgment. And if there be any who for a time obey, under the common idea that they must obey, even when the order is erroneous; yet certainly this can not be firm and constant, and so perseverance fails, or at least the perfection of Obedience, which consists in obeying promptly and with alacrity; for there can be no alacrity and diligence where there is dissent of heart and mind. There is an end to earnestness and speed of execution, when we doubt whether it be useful or no to do what we are ordered: there is an end to the renowned simplicity of blind Obedience, when we inwardly call in question the rectitude of the command, and perhaps even condemn the Superior, because he bids us to do what we do not find very pleasant; there is an end to humility; for although on the one hand we obey, yet, on the other, we prefer ourselves to our Superior; an end to fortitude in difficult enterprises, and (to embrace all in one word) there is an end to the whole force and dignity of this virtue. And in their place arise pain, trouble, reluctance, wearinesss, murmurings, excuses, and other by no means trifling vices, by which the value and merit of Obedience are wholly destroyed. And so St. Bernard says of those who take unpleasant commands in bad part: "If you begin to be annoyed at this, to judge your Superior, to murmur in your heart, though outwardly you fulfil

[1] Coll. ii. 11.

what is commanded, this is not the virtue of patience, but a cloak of your malice." [1] And if peace and tranquillity of mind are sought, he certainly shall never enjoy them who has within himself the cause of disquiet and trouble, to wit, the disagreement of his own judgment with the law of Obedience.

13. And therefore for the maintenance of union, which is the bond of every society, the Apostle earnestly exhorts all [2] to think and say the same thing, that, by the agreement of their wills and judgments, they may be mutually comforted and sustained. Now if the members and the head ought to be of one and the same sentiment, you may easily judge whether it is fairer that the head should agree with the members, or the members with the head. It is plain, then, by what has hitherto been said, how necessary this Obedience of the understanding is.

14. But how perfect it is in itself, and how pleasing to God, is shown by this: first, because thereby the most excellent and precious part of man is consecrated unto Him; secondly, because the obedient man is by this means made a living holocaust most pleasing to His divine Majesty, since he keeps nothing whatever of his own; lastly, by reason of the great difficulty of the combat; for the obedient man overcomes himself for God's sake, and resists that natural inclination which is inbred in all men, to embrace and follow their own opinion. Hence it is that, though the special function of Obedience seems to be to perfect the will, inasmuch as it makes it prompt and ready at the Superior's call; yet it must also belong to the understanding, as we have declared, and bring it to be of the same opinion in all things as the Superior, that, striving with all the forces of our will and understanding, we may come to speed and fulness of execution.

[1] Rom. xv. 5; I. Cor. i. 10; II. Cor. xiii. 11. [2] Philipp. ii. 2.

15. I seem, dear Brethren, to hear you say that you now no longer doubt the necessity of this virtue, but that you earnestly desire to know how you may attain to its perfection. To this question I answer with St. Leo: "Nothing is difficult to the humble, and nothing hard to the meek:" so that if you are not wanting in humility or meekness, assuredly God will not be wanting in goodness, to help you to perform what you have promised Him, not patiently only but willingly.

16. And now I put before you three things in particular which greatly help to the attainment of this Obedience of understanding. The first is: that, as I said in the beginning, you do not behold in the person of your Superior a man subject to errors and miseries, but Christ Himself, who is supreme Wisdom, boundless Goodness, and infinite Charity, who neither can be deceived, nor wishes to deceive you. And because you are intimately conscious that you took this yoke of Obedience upon you for the love of God, to the end that you might, in following the Superior's will, more certainly follow the divine Will; do not doubt that the faithful charity of Our Lord continually governs and leads you by right ways, by the ministry of those whom He has set over you. And so hear the voice and orders of the Superior, no otherwise than as the voice of Christ, for the Apostle, too, writing in the same sense to the Colossians, and exhorting subjects to obey their lords, says: "Whatsoever you do, do it from the heart, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that you shall receive of the Lord the reward of inheritance; serve ye the Lord Christ." [1] And St. Bernard: "Whether God, or man the vicar of God, commands anything, we must obey with equal diligence, and submit with equal reverence, when however man commands nothing that is contrary to God."[2] And thus if you do not look upon man with the eyes of the

[1] Coll. iii. 23, 24. [2] Tract. de Præcep. et Dispen. ch. xii.

body, but upon God with those of the soul, it will certainly not be hard to conform your will and judgment to that rule of your actions which you have yourselves chosen.

17. Another plan is, that you always seriously endeavor to defend within yourselves your Superior's command or opinion, and by no means to argue against it. And to this it will help, to be well affected toward whatever he orders; for so you will come to obey, not only without trouble, but even with pleasure and joy. For, as St. Leo says, "It is not hard to serve, where we love what is commanded."[1]

18. The last method of submitting the understanding is at once more easy and secure, and also adopted by the holy Fathers, viz., to determine within yourselves that whatever the Superior commands is the commandment and will of almighty God Himself: and as to believe what the Catholic faith proposes, you at once bend all the forces of your mind to assent thereunto: so to do whatever your Superior commands, you must be borne by a kind of blind impulse of your will, eager to obey, without stopping to argue at all. So we may believe Abraham[2] did, when bid to sacrifice his son Isaac: so in the time of the New Testament, did some of those holy Fathers whom Cassian speaks of; as John the Abbot,[3] who did not consider whether what was commanded was profitable or not, as when with such great and continued labor, for a whole year together he watered a dry stick; nor whether it could be done or not, as when he endeavored so heartily to move a huge rock, which many men together could not have stirred. This kind of Obedience we see was sometimes confirmed by miracle. For, to say nothing of others, whom you will remember, Maurus, St. Benedict's

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[1] Serm. 4. de jejun. sep. mensis. [2] Gen. xxii.
[3] L. 4, ch. xxiv. et xxvi.

disciple,[1] went by command of his Superior into a lake, and did not sink. Another,[2] being bid by his Superior to bring a lioness to him, took hold of her and brought her to him. This method, then, of submitting our own judgment, so as without questioning, to sanction and approve within ourselves whatever the Superior commands, is not only a common practice among holy men, but also to be imitated by those who are in pursuit of perfect Obedience, in all things not evidently coupled with sin.

19. Nor are you hindered by this, if anything occurs to you different from the Superior's opinion, and it seems (after consulting God in prayer) that it ought to be declared, from laying your view before him: but lest self-love and your own judgment should deceive you in this, the precaution is to be taken of keeping your mind, both before and after making the proposal, quite calm and ready, not only to take up or lay aside the matter in question, but also to approve and think better whatever seems good to the Superior.

20. Now what I have said of Obedience, is equally to be observed by every private person toward his immediate Superior, and by Rectors and local Superiors toward the Provincial, by Provincials toward the General, and by the General toward him whom God has set over him, viz., His Vicar upon earth: so that a perfect distinction of ranks, and consequently peace and charity, may be preserved; without which the right government neither of our Society, nor of any other Congregation, can be maintained. For it is in this way that divine Providence disposes all things gently, and brings them to their appointed ends, the lowest by the midmost, and the midmost by the highest. Hence, for example, that series of angelic hierarchies subordinate one to another, and that

[1] Greg. 2, Dial. ch. vii. [2] In vit. PP. L. 5, libel. 14, n. 4

perfect harmony of the celestial and all other moving bodies, each in its own fixed place and position; the revolutions and movements of which proceed in due order, from one supreme mover by degrees unto the lowest. The same we see upon earth, in every State which is regulated by good laws, and especially in the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, whose members and functions are all derived from one general Vicar of Christ our Lord; and the more exactly this arrangement and order is kept, the more orderly and better is the whole government; and on the other hand, no one can fail to see what grievous damage has been inflicted on many societies of men by its neglect. And therefore in this Society, of which Our Lord has committed to me some charge and care, I strongly desire this virtue may be practised as diligently, and flourish as perfectly, as if the good and safety of our whole Society consisted in it.

21. Wherefore, that my Epistle may end where it began, I most earnestly beseech you for Christ our Lord's sake, who gave Himself to us not only as a Master, but also as an Example of Obedience, that you will strain every nerve to attain this virtue; and that with a greedy appetite for so glorious a victory, you will endeavor to overcome yourselves, that is, to conquer and subdue the highest and most difficult part of your soul, your will, I mean, and judgment; in order that the solid and true knowledge and love of God Almighty our Lord, may draw your whole souls to Him, and rule and govern you in the whole course of this life and pilgrimage, until at length He brings you, and many others assisted by your labors and example, to the last happy end of bliss everlasting.

I commend myself earnestly to your prayers to God.

From Rome, the 26th of March, 1553.

Part IV.

On Community Life.

CHAPTER I.

ON WHAT IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY COMMUNITY LIFE.

Community life is the life which in all things and at all times is conformed to the monastic Rules. These Rules have fixed and determined everything. The observances of each day, each week are marked out. There are the employments and exercises in which all the Community take part; there are others which are only for some members of the Community, suited to their rank, their office, the state of their health. All that concerns the food, the clothes of the Religious, the furnishing of the cells is minutely prescribed. The times of silence in the cloister and the intercourse to be permitted with persons living in the world are likewise regulated with thoughtful care by the wise founders of the various Orders. In short, everything is foreseen and provided for.

The common life consists in keeping closely to what is decreed and ordained on diverse points and in diverse circumstances.

Those who love Community life abhor exemptions, shun singularity like the plague, look on alleviations as punish-

ments, although they accept them gratefully when this is required by obedience. They delight and find their happiness in the tranquil uniformity which is the result of the regularity, the perfect order which prevails in the cloister. The Superior knows that the common life is as much for him as for the lowest of his subordinates, and the inferior rejoices in the consciousness that he will never have to depart from this unvarying and blissful rule (as the Superior may perhaps have to do).

With a view to arousing the love of Community life within his heart, the Religious often reminds himself that it is simply and entirely the life God wills for him, and that without its pale his salvation would be imperilled, self-love, sensuality, and pride encouraged, and true peace would be sought in vain.

St. Bernard has well said: "There is nothing so pleasing to God as common life, common interests, and affections."

Father Balthasar Alvarez, who was remarkable for his spirit of discernment and enlightened wisdom, used to say that to live with the Community and as the Community, was the sacrifice most acceptable to God, and the most fertile source of benediction. His biographers relate that if any one asked him to impose some extraordinary penance upon him, he would answer: "Follow all the exercises of the Community, without exemptions or privileges. Better far to live not quite so long, or not enjoy such good health, and do all with the Community, than live to a great age in robust health by means of dispenses and privileges which excite jealousy in others." As for him, he implored of God this grace, which he considered a very great one: power to follow the Community life unto the last; and although he had many bodily infirmities, he concealed them in order not to fall out of the ranks. Experience had taught him that the Religious who is scrupulous in conforming to the common life receives help from

God, makes progress in virtue, and finds time for everything, for his spiritual exercises and his ordinary employments.

Thus our own spiritual welfare requires us to adhere closely to the Community life, as a shipwrecked mariner clings to a plank. None can tell to what perils he would be exposed without this safeguard.

Sometimes it happens that individuals who had a really good vocation, and who displayed great fervor in the novitiate and during the first few years subsequent to their profession, have left their Order and gone back to the world. What is the chief cause of such an unhappy act? It is their want of courage and perseverance in conforming to the Community life; their self-indulgence which has led them to ask for dispenses without adequate cause; it is the exemptions and privileges which a weak Superior has granted them. Nor are these the only causes; sometimes even in the most exemplary Communities one meets with those strangely constituted minds who only attach importance to actions out of the common; they lead a separate life, they are addicted to the performance of acts of penance or of zeal which are not authorized by obedience, and thus they leave the beaten track, and their vocation itself is endangered.

This is a great, a very great misfortune; and the cause of it is told in a few sad but true words: Grace no longer abides with these foolish, deluded Religious. For a time Nature, which is full of pride, and delights in these eccentricities because they afford food for that same pride; Nature, I say, is sustained by her own strength, but presently her strength is exhausted; she then feels the need of change, and imagines that her environment is no longer congenial and suitable for her. From this conviction to the relinquishment of her early vocation there is but a step, a step soon taken unless some extraordinary

grace enlightens the unhappy soul who is the sport of an illusion, showing her the abyss whither her irregularities are hurrying her.

But, it may be said, the lives of the saints, even of saints who lived in a Community, abound in incidents which show that they did not fear extraordinary ways, and often, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, practised the greatest, most peculiar austerities.

To this we answer: In the first place, St. John bids us "try the spirits, if they be of God" (I. John iv. 1). It can not be doubted, says a spiritual writer, that the saints would never have become saints if they had not acquiesced in the divine impulse which urged them to practise exceptional and singular virtues; but it is the duty of the Superior, before giving his consent, to take pains to ascertain the spirit which actuates the Religious in aspiring to these virtues; his obedience in abandoning them or obstinacy in clinging to them will be the criterion. He ought, in the second place, to beware of appearing to think highly of these unusual favors, and considering these exceptional virtues to be an undoubted mark of sanctity; for thereby he would incur the risk of laying a snare for the humility of the recipient of these favors, of encouraging others who are not called to the same way in deluding themselves, perhaps even of exciting jealousy amongst the rest of the Community. Women in general are apt to be greatly elated by these extraordinary gifts; they must be reminded that St. Paul places charity before the most sublime and rare gifts, and that the fundamental principle which it is all important to establish is the sanctity that the Rule requires and Community life produces.

2. Under no circumstances must the signal graces bestowed on the saints be allowed to prove prejudicial to the common good. Should it be so, we must conclude

that God requires them to leave their monastery, and although this rarely occurs, yet it is known to have been the case. St. Pachomius, acting under divine inspiration, begged St. Macarius to retire from the Community, because he feared lest the extraordinary life to which that eminent servant of God was called might be detrimental to the spirit of regularity which prevailed amongst his monks; and the same occurred in the case of St. Simeon Stylites, when his Superior discovered that holy recluse to be called to act in an exceptional manner.

But as we have said, such things are rare, and the usual effect of extraordinary graces, wonderful virtues, signal favors from on high, is to confirm the desire for community life. Witness this passage from the autobiography of B. Margaret Mary. She writes thus:

"When the time of my profession drew near, they set upon me again, telling me that it was very evident that I should never assimilate myself to the spirit of the Visitation, to which all ways subject to illusion or deception were foreign. I laid this before my sovereign Lord with bitter lamentations, saying: 'Alas! O my Lord, is it possible that Thou wilt be the cause of my being sent away?' Whereupon He answered me: 'Tell thy Superior that she need not be afraid to receive you, I will answer for you and be your surety, if she considers Me sufficient security.' On my repeating this to my Superior, she bade me ask, as a pledge of His suretyship, that He would make me of use to the Order by the strict observance of all its rules and usages. In His loving kindness He replied: 'I will grant that, my Daughter, and more besides, for I will render thee more useful than she has any idea of, to the Order; but in a manner which as yet I alone know; and henceforth I will so adapt My grace to the spirit of the Order, to the will of thy Superior and to thy own frailty, that thou mayst look with suspicion

on everything that interferes with the exact observance of the Rule, to which it is My will that thou shouldst give the preference before everything else.'"

What a grand and fertile subject of meditation these last words afford to those who are consecrated to God, and what a useful lesson for the instruction and enlightenment of those unstable, immortified souls, lovers of eccentricity, who seem to have no other incentive to action, no other rule of life than the whims of their undisciplined nature, the dreams of imagination or the impulsive zeal of an indiscreet devotion!

CHAPTER II.

ON THE BLESSINGS OF COMMUNITY LIFE.

THE four chief blessings attached to Community life are: Peace of mind, union of hearts, the edification of the Brethren, and the prosperity of the Order. Let us briefly explain what is meant by these.

1. Peace of mind. Community life is the source of great interior peace for the Religious who faithfully fulfils its obligations, and this is why:

St. Augustine, in his commentary on these words of the 84th Psalm: "Justice and peace have kissed," has this pleasing remark: "Justice and peace are two friends; they embrace one another, they exchange the kiss of mutual fond affection; wherefore if you do not love justice, the friend of peace, peace will not love you and will not come and abide with you." Now the justice of which he speaks is, according to the opinion of commentators, all the virtues as a whole.

Community life if rightly understood and carried into practice is really an aggregate of all the virtues; it affords occasion for the practice of humility, self-denial, obedience, charity, modesty, patience, devotion. What more do we want? Therefore in it we possess peace; peace will form a firm friendship with us, seeing that, thanks to the common life, she will find in us her faultless friend, justice, in whom all the gifts of God are united.

St. Bonaventure thus beautifully expresses this: "Let

those who profess the religious life enter heartily into the common life, regarding it as most holy, one may almost say angelic. Let them give themselves to it devoutly and fervently, and never depart from all that is in the common rule, unless under stress of necessity, whether it be reciting the Divine Office, or matters concerning the food provided for the Community, in anything whatsoever, in short. God bestows so special a benediction on all that is done in common, that what is good becomes better, and what is defective is mercifully pardoned. The Lord dwells in the monastery where the Religious are united among themselves, and there He rests where peace reigns."

Yes, the God of all peace is with the Religious who perseveres in the punctual observance of the rules of common life; and the peace he enjoys surpasses, as St. Paul says, all understanding, whereas, as the author of the Imitation tells us, " he that is seeking to become free and unrestrained will always be in trouble, for one thing or other will ever displease him" (B. i. Ch. 25.).

We appeal to the experience both of fervent and lukewarm Religious in confirmation of what has been said on this point.

2. The second blessing attaching to Community life is union of hearts.

If, in virtue of the common life when faithfully followed, the peace of the Holy Spirit pervades the hearts of all the brethren, they can not fail to be otherwise than united amongst themselves in a close and intimate union. For the Holy Spirit is the true, the indissoluble bond of souls, and the interior peace of which He is the source, influences the mutual relations of the members of the Community, uniting them one with another in a natural and pleasant manner.

Moreover when discipline is maintained in a monastery, and the Rule with all its observances is strictly kept, a

mutual esteem prevails among the members of the Community. Each one feels this esteem for his brethren; sometimes this feeling amounts to a kind of veneration. In fact, the Religious who is always faithful, always exact, unfailing in his regularity, is worthy of no slight reverence.

Now this mutual esteem, this simple, heartfelt reverence, is plainly productive of close union, and this charitable, friendly frame of mind existing in a Community may well be compared to the precious ointment spoken of in the 132d Psalm, on Aaron's head, which ran down upon his beard, and even to the skirts of his garments.

3. The third benediction of Community life is the edification of the brethren.

It is undeniable that every Religious is bound to edify his brethren, and this obligation is a most important one. If, unhappily, it were to be neglected in a monastery, the ruin of that House would not be far off. Now a Religious can give no greater edification to his brethren than that which is given by fidelity to the common rule. In this respect he may exercise a powerful influence for good. Who knows not how strong an impression is made on us by one whose life is always regular, always faithful to duty and to the obligations he has taken on himself! It is said that words have an effect, but example is irresistible. Now nowhere is the truth of this saying more evident than in the cloister. The different members of a Community know that they all have the same duties, the same obligations; but all have not the same courage, the same generosity, the same constancy in fulfilling those duties. Some are phlegmatic, negligent, lukewarm. But if one of the Religious, or several of them, are seen to be always exact, always punctual, always attentive and assiduous in all that the Rule prescribes, whether in respect to vows or observances, who can resist the force of example? who can continue any longer lax and negligent? On the one

hand, the careless would feel the stings of conscience; on the other, the example of their more zealous brethren would incite and encourage them to do better; they have but to apply themselves to the common life.

Let every Religious tell himself that he is bound thus to contribute in promoting the perfection of all, not by any extraordinary practices, nor, in most cases, by admonition and exhortation, but by a fervent and unflagging adherence to the regulations of Community life.

4. The fourth blessing attached to Community life is the prosperity of the Order.

Another obligation binding on the Religious consists in promoting the real well-being of his Order. This obligation is grounded on gratitude, charity, and justice; what reason he has to be grateful to his Order, how much it has done for him! How valuable are the benefits which he derived from the religious training of the novitiate, and which he will receive from the Order during the remainder of his life! Charity also enjoins this duty, because the prosperity of the Order depends on the sanctity of its members, and the Religious is undoubtedly bound to exert himself to the utmost for the sanctification of his brethren. Finally justice requires him to contribute to the welfare of the Order, because it is only just that it should attain its end, accomplish the work which was the object of its foundation, and shed abroad in the Church of God the good odor of Christ, which is the end for which all the Orders are instituted. Now the members of any religious Institute wrong that Institute if they do not labor efficaciously to further its prosperity.

No doubt therefore is possible on this point; every Religious is bound to contribute to the welfare; the true prosperity of his Order.

But in what does this welfare, this prosperity consist? Primarily and essentially in the exact, willing, unremitting

observance of Community life. This it is that confirms the authority of the Rule, and exhibits it in all its dignity and beauty; this it is which exalts the authority of the Superiors and makes it respected; this it is which gives the weight and importance they merit to the simple usages which are traditional in a monastery; this it is which brings all wills into harmony, upholds the weak, increases the generosity of the fervent, and thus maintains an exemplary zeal amongst the members of the religious family. Through this regularity discipline is never relaxed; the aim of the Order is attained with greater facility, the work peculiar to the Religious is performed with discretion and prudence, and consequently with God's blessing and unfailing success. In the season of trial all find consolation in Community life; in the time of prosperity it forms a barrier to the laxity which is apt to creep in. For institutions in their infancy it is the best means of securing solid progress, vigorous growth and vital force. For more mature Institutions it is the salt that preserves them from corruption, the vivifying sap which makes them evermore bear fresh fruits; finally it develops in them a mysterious force and energy which seems to set upon them the stamp of immortality.

May this never be forgotten by the religious Institutions whose desire it is to perfume the Church of Jesus Christ with the fragrance of their good works! The common life, a life entirely conformed to the primitive rules which the Church has sanctioned and approved, as well as to the time-honored customs which have been handed down to posterity as a precious legacy in regard to the interior arrangements of the monastery and the intercourse to be permitted with seculars, etc.; the common life, I say, affords the great test as to whether God has established His kingdom in that House. The number of novices can not exactly be taken as a proof of this blessed state of

things, nor the rapid spread of the Order and the numerous foundations that are made. No, rapid growth is sometimes the forerunner of speedy decay. But if the Rule be always kept, the regulations of Community life strictly observed, this may be taken as a manifest sign that divine grace pervades and sanctifies an Order, rendering it a burnt-offering of sweet savor to the God of infinite majesty.

CHAPTER III.

ON COMMUNITY LIFE AND THE LIFE OF SACRIFICE.

COMMUNITY life and the life of sacrifice are one and the same life. This we shall proceed to prove. They are identical for two reasons; of these the first is based on the duties of the religious state, and the second on the condition to which our fallen nature has reduced us; but this needs no explanation.

The principal duty which the religious state imposes on one who embraces it is to live everywhere and always in a victim's spirit of self-surrender. As we have often repeated, it is on the day of his profession that the Religious is laid as a victim on the sacrificial altar, and that same day witnesses his definite admission to the Community. He will therefore live the life of the Community in virtue of his profession and of his dedication as a victim. Now it is clear that from that time forth he is bound to keep all the rules and faithfully observe all the practices which constitute the common life, in the spirit of a victim. This spirit will imbue all his actions, the least as well as the greatest, whether he obeys the bell that bids him rise, makes his meditation, goes to the chapel for Mass, or attends the Chapter; whether he keeps the hours of silence, is remarkable for his modesty, his punctuality; whether he joins the others at recreation, or betakes himself to manual labor or some other occupation; in his relations to the other members of the Community, to

his Superiors, to persons living in the world; in seasons of infirmity, of humiliation, of sickness; in each and all of his actions and circumstances the Religious remains a victim, a victim always bound on the altar of sacrifice. For him every act is an act of worship, and whatever the nature of his various employments during the day, the one on which he is occupied at the moment is either an ascription of glory to God, an act of atonement offered to Him, or an oblation which He is entreated to accept.

We have seen, in an earlier part of this work, that the life of Our Lord upon earth was one of continual sacrifice. From the moment of His offering Himself as a victim to His Father at His Incarnation, His every act without exception, both interior and exterior, was performed by Him in this character of a sacrificial victim, and each one of those acts would have sufficed, more than sufficed, for our Redemption. How admirable is this constant, life-long self-sacrifice, these unceasing acts of oblation! The secret of them is revealed by the words He uttered: "I seek not My own glory, I seek the glory of My Father, for I do always the things that please Him" (John viii. 29).

Now in this respect the good Religious perfectly resembles Jesus Christ. The very name he bears signifies that his life is one of religion, of consecration to the service of God, to offer Him unceasing praise in the spirit of sacrifice. St. Paul said of the early Christians that they were "a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (I. Pet. ii. 5). But this is doubly true of the Religious who is preeminently that holy temple, who is invested with that kingly priesthood which enables him to offer unceasingly, under all circumstances, in all that he does, spiritual burnt-offerings which God is pleased to accept through Jesus Christ.

Thus it is obvious that if the Religious faithfully fulfils the principal duty of his state, that of self-surrender, for him the Community life and the life of sacrifice are one and the selfsame life. We shall have occasion to expound this essential point more in detail as we proceed to consider the various observances that constitute the common life.

But if the duty of his state is the first reason which renders it incumbent on the Religious to make common life a life of perpetual self-sacrifice, it must also be said, seeing how miserable is the condition to which our fallen nature has brought us, it is impossible that this life, if rightly carried out, should not furnish abundant occasion for self-immolation, self-denial, the complete annihilation of self.

In the Imitation we read this sentence which at first sight strikes us as somewhat strange: "Thou must learn to break thine own will in many things, if thou wilt keep peace and concord with others; it is no small matter to dwell in monasteries or in a Congregation, and to live therein without contradiction" (B. i. Ch. 17). This is as much as saying that Community life is a life of self-immolation and sacrifice. St. Bernard is reported to have declared Community life to be a martyrdom. *Vita communis martyrium.*

St. John of the Cross speaks still more plainly: "Imagine," he says, "that your brethren are so many sculptors, hammer and chisel in hand, and that you are placed before them like a block of stone, intended in the designs of God to be fashioned into a statue representing the Man of sorrows, reproducing in every feature Christ crucified." These are forcible words. What conditions they propose to us: present pain and future glory! Thus all our brethren contribute, one in one manner, one in another, but all by painful means, to make of us a victim without a vestige of will, without a remnant of self.

Let us not deceive ourselves, for in fact differences of temperament, of character, of early training, of nationality, of age, and who knows what else besides, all concur to create a strange and unfortunate hostility, covert if not open, amongst those who live in Community. We say *covert if not open,* but now and again that antagonism must show itself in words, demeanor, in a thousand trifles which, slight as they may appear, are yet not without meaning; and a feeling of opposition rises up within us, which sometimes is but a thorn-prick, at others a deep thrust from a sharp sword. There are some sensitive, excessively impressionable natures to whom nothing is a mere prick, but everything seems a cruel and painful wound. Generally this depends on the natural disposition; sometimes, however, it is the result of a divine and special dispensation. Our Lord once said to B. Margaret Mary: "For the purpose of perfecting thee in patience, I shall augment thy sensitiveness and thy aversions, so as to cause thee to find occasions of humiliation and suffering even in the most trivial and indifferent matters."

However this may be, in either case the immolation is always agonizing, the crucifixion always cruel.

And, strange to say, one might really think this sensitiveness had somehow been developed since our entrance into religion. Were there no contradictions to be encountered, no clashing of interests in our family circle, in society at large? Or can it be that self-love, taking advantage of the external propriety which the name, the habit, the life of a Religious confers, makes us more touchy on the point of honor? Or again—and we will hope that this is the most probable supposition—have the words of Holy Scripture been verified in our case, and "because we are acceptable to God, we are tried in the furnace of temptation"? At any rate, our susceptibility, often foolish, is a source of suffering. Some trivial word will offend us

as much as if it were a gross insult, and a want of consideration will appear in our eyes as an intentional display of spite and aversion. Patience! it is the sacrificial blade that strikes us under one form or another. Let us submit to it with calm, humble resignation; is it not right that the victim should be slain?

The Rule itself with the uniformity and punctuality it demands is in itself another means of sacrifice. Always the same exercises at the same time, the same food, the same surroundings. Some find this uniformity enjoyable, but many find it wearisome. If we are amongst the latter, we must arm ourselves with courage and constancy and not be disheartened if we can not habituate ourselves to this or that work or custom; rather let us be vigilant and zealous, and, as the author of the Imitation bids us, live more devoutly and keep our Rule more strictly, as shortly about to receive the reward of our labors from God (B. i. Ch. 19).

Not only the uniformity required of us, but the punctuality, is a source of trial. Always to rise at the first sound of the bell, to break off abruptly what one is doing when we are summoned elsewhere, without stopping to finish a word if we are writing; instantly to leave some pleasant employment to say the office or do something irksome; to join the others at recreation when we would fain remain alone in our cell; to engage in some toilsome work when we think we need relaxation; all this and more besides crucifies nature relentlessly. Let us console ourselves with the recollection that obedience is the perfection of sacrifice, and that by unremitting and exact faithfulness in the least things appertaining to the Rule, we shall deserve at a later period to enter into the joy of Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE HOLY RULES AND THE OBLIGATIONS THEY IMPOSE ON THE RELIGIOUS.

Every Religious knows in what the Rules of his Order consist; that is to say, what are the laws which regulate his conduct in Community life, whether it be the Rule properly so called, the Constitutions, the book of statutes, or the local customs. He is made acquainted with these in the novitiate. Consequently, it is unnecessary for us to enter into details as to the exact meaning of these terms; the more so as they are understood in a different sense in different Orders.

The important matter is to establish the authority of the holy Rules, and to know in what way we are to observe them.

The authority of the Rule is derived from the approbation of the Holy See, or of the bishop of the diocese; of the Holy See, when, after trial has been made of the Rule, the Vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth has vouchsafed to signify his approval of it formally; of the bishop of the diocese, when, during the infancy of a new Congregation, he is pleased to give to it his sanction and approbation.

The Rules approved by the Holy See are indisputably of greater authority than those which have only received episcopal approbation, although these have great weight and can claim to be regarded with much respect by the Religious.

The authority of the Rule is so real and incontestable

that the obligation of keeping it follows as a necessary consequence. This obligation does not therefore, as will be seen, rest on the vow of obedience, but on the sanction given by lawful authority to the code of laws which govern the Congregation. In fact the vow that the Religious takes is not to keep the Rule, but to obey as the Rule ordains.

Every Community is a society. Every society has need of legislation to ensure order and maintain harmony and concord amongst the members. When once the Rules have been officially approved, they become binding. In this way every Religious is bound to keep the Rule; and the novices also, who as yet have taken no vow, are bound to conform to the laws of the Order of which they aspire to become members.

But to what extent are the Rules obligatory? Are they binding under pain of mortal sin, or only of venial sin or is it merely required to perform some penance imposed as the penalty of transgressing them?

Here is the answer to these queries:

The injunctions contained in the Rule may be divided into three distinct classes: 1. Those that are already enjoined by the law of God, such as commands relating to divine worship, charity, etc. 2. Those that have reference to the laws of the Church, to the religious vows, and to the enclosure (if the Religious are cloistered). 3. Those which, to borrow St. Francis of Sales' words, are only given for the direction and guidance of the members of the Congregation, such as to observe the hours of silence or not to eat between meals.

Now the violation of the first class of injunctions, which appertain to the law of God, is a mortal or a venial sin according as the matter is grave or slight and the deed done with full knowledge and deliberation or the reverse.

The same may be said concerning the injunctions which

relate to the religious vows and the enclosure. This subject was fully treated of in the third part of this work.

But what are we to think about the injunctions which are intended for the direction and guidance of the Religious? They are far more numerous, and may be said to be the substance of the religious code properly so called; they are what is submitted for approbation first to the Ordinary, subsequently to the Holy See.

In the greater number of Orders these injunctions considered only in themselves are not binding under pain of mortal or venial sin. We say in *the greater number of Orders*, because there are some whose Rules are obligatory under pain of sin, St. Benedict's, for instance. But unless this obligation is expressly stated one may take for granted that it does not exist.

We also said *considered in themselves*, for this reason, because if the transgression of the Rules, or of one single Rule, arises from contempt of authority or some other blameworthy frame of mind, undoubtedly it is sinful. We will listen to what St. Francis says on this point, he who speaks so wisely and so decidedly on such matters. In this he does but repeat the teaching of St. Thomas.

"The Constitutions in themselves are not in any way binding under pain of either mortal or venial sin; they are only given for the direction and guidance of the members of the Congregation. However, if any one of the Sisters were to transgress them wittingly and willingly, thinking them of no moment, and perhaps thereby giving scandal either to her fellow-Religious or to strangers, she would undoubtedly commit a serious fault, for it is impossible to exonerate one who disparages and brings into contempt the things of God, who belies her profession, brings disorder into the Congregation, and blights the fruits of good example and good odor which she ought to produce to the edification of her neighbor. Such an exhibition of

studied contempt for authority would certainly ere long draw down some severe chastisement from Heaven, and first and foremost would be the withdrawal of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, of which those are usually deprived who renounce their good intentions and depart from the path in which God has placed them.

"Now contempt for the Constitutions, as of all good works, may be known by the following marks:

"The Religious renders himself guilty of it, if out of contempt he transgresses or neglects some order, not merely voluntarily but purposely; if he errs through inadvertence, forgetfulness, or yields to some sudden impulse, it is a different matter; contempt implies a deliberate intention and determination to act in such a manner. Hence it follows that whoever breaks the Rule or disobeys through contempt, not only disobeys, but does so with the full intention to disobey. For instance, eating between meal-times is forbidden; the Sister who allows herself to do so breaks the Rule and is guilty of disobedience; but if she eats something nice, from the wish to gratify her palate, she too disobeys, not for the sake of disobeying, but out of greediness; but if she eats something because she despises the Rule and will not heed it or submit to it, then she disobeys out of contempt and for disobedience' sake.

"Moreover, he who transgresses a Rule or Constitution out of contempt, shows that he considers it despicable and useless, and this is great presumption on his part; or else if he deems it useful and yet will not submit to it himself, then he departs from his early resolution when he entered religion, and he does great harm to his neighbor on account of the scandal he gives and his bad example; he breaks the promise he made to the Order, he upsets a devout House; all of which are most blameworthy actions.

"But in order to have some test whereby to ascertain

whether in any violation of the Rules or act of disobedience the offender was actuated by contempt, let us observe:

"1. Whether, when reproved, he takes it as a jest, and shows no sign of penitence;

"2. Whether he continues to act in the same manner without exhibiting either wish or intention to amend;

"3. Whether he contests the expediency of the Rule or command;

"4. Whether he endeavors to induce others to break the Rule likewise, and encourages them to do so by telling them it is a mere nothing, they need not be afraid."

Such is the opinion of the holy bishop; and from what he goes on to say we see that he has no notion of allowing Religious to regard infringements of the Rule as matters of no moment.

"As for violations of the Rule which are not prompted by a spirit of disobedience and contempt for authority, if they arise from indifference, weakness, temptation, or negligence, they may be confessed as venial sins; for although they are not in any way sinful in virtue of the obligation imposed by the Rule, yet they may be so because of the negligence, carelessness, precipitation, or other faults involved in them. For it seldom happens that if we voluntarily neglect to perform some good actions calculated to advance our spiritual welfare, and which we are unmistakably invited and called to perform, we offend against God by so doing; for this omission can only proceed from carelessness, perversity, or want of fervor; and if we shall have to render account for every idle word, how much more for having rendered idle and useless the injunction to be faithful in carrying out the Rule."

It would be superfluous to add anything to this wise exhortation. We will proceed to examine a subject which is the complement of the one of which we have been speaking, the spirit of strict observance.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE SPIRIT OF STRICT OBSERVANCE.

THE spirit of strict observance is a state of mind which, grounded on a high esteem for the holy Rule, disposes us to observe them as perfectly as possible.

The Religious who is animated by this spirit places his Rule above everything, because to him it represents the will of God. There may be exercises which, in the abstract, are of a higher type, and works more holy than those which his Rule appoints for him; but for him, for the work of his own personal salvation, nothing is comparable to what is contained in the holy Rule, what is taught and commanded by it. Hence nothing in the regular observances is little in his eyes; all is worthy of respect, and in everything he is equally attentive and scrupulous. If some things are apparently trivial, in the light in which he regards them they are weighty and honorable, for it is in the light of God's good pleasure that he views them. He does not forget that Jesus, our divine Exemplar, our adorable Victim, willed to fulfil the whole law, to the least jot and tittle; *iota unum aut unus apex*. He recalls with loving admiration the conduct of our divine Master, who, after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, for the instruction of His apostles, bade them: "Gather up the fragments that remain, lest they be lost" (John vi. 12).

He often meditates upon this admonition of Holy Scripture: "Let not the part of a good gift overpass thee";

(Ecclus. xiv. 14). Now this good gift is his vocation, the signal grace of the religious life.

Who can call anything little, when the Rule is in question? He who despises them will speedily learn the truth of the words of the Wise Man: "He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little" (Ib. xix. 1). Before long he will contemn great things as well, and he will fall away deplorably from his early fervor. Our Lord Himself says: "He that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater" (Luke xvi. 10). "A small thing," says St. Augustine, "is but a small thing, yet it is a great thing to be faithful in what are small things." This sentence ought to be inscribed on the walls in every religious House.

Thus the Religious ought to give the preference to the most minute regulations of the Rule over and above every kind of good work, however excellent, which is not prescribed by the Rule. If indeed his attraction to other extraordinary works is inspired by the Holy Ghost, and permission is given him to obey that attraction, then let him leave his Community and lead a hermit's life; but so long as the impulse has not been pronounced true and unmistakably divine, let him know that the only safe course for him is in conforming to the injunctions contained in the Constitutions and the book of Customs; and that, as a former Bishop of Lyons says: "The monk ought only to reckon himself to have lived on those days which he has spent without breaking a single one of his Rules."

Not only does he reverence the least injunctions of the Rule, but he loves the very text itself, couched as it is in the language of bygone times, old-fashioned and quaint in style. Not for any consideration would he have it changed. The ancient, not to say antiquated, wording seems to him by its simplicity better fitted to render the

ideas, the spirit of the early founders. To modernize it would appear a profanation to him. This may sound exaggerated, but we know that many Religious feel in this way. The book of Constitutions is their most precious treasure. It is said that after Holy Scripture, no book ever written equals the "Imitation of Christ." Not for the Religious; for him the Constitutions, the Directory, come next to the Bible.

Let us then cherish a deep love and veneration for the Rule. It ought to be read on one's knees, committed to memory if possible, and its contents should frequently be taken as the subject of meditation.

The spirit of strict observance also makes the Religious love the holy Rules and regulations at all times.

When traveling, he keeps as closely as he can to what is done in the Community, both as to the time of the exercises and the manner of performing them. Journeys are always somewhat beset with danger for those who are consecrated to God, although undertaken in obedience; the spirit of regularity is their chief safeguard.

If sickness obliges the Religious to remain in his cell or in the infirmary, he does his utmost to follow the common life and to be present in spirit amongst his brethren.

If he fills some post, and the occupations of his office compel him sometimes to absent himself from the regular exercises, this is a grief to him, and his great object is to get done in order to join the Community. He knows that Holy Scripture says: "Woe to him that is alone," and that Our Lord promises that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He will be in the midst of them.

Finally, if he is advanced in age, let him beware of indulging the too common delusion that old age entitles one to ask for, or even to take one's self, dispenses that are not really necessary; on the contrary he ought to consider

himself more than ever bound by the obligation to keep the common Rule. It is not for those who are drawing near to the goal to slacken their pace. It is not the time to multiply infractions of the Rule when the strict Judge will soon call on us to render an account of the promises we have made to Him. Moreover, the younger Religious fix an unsparing gaze on the conduct of their seniors, and they often model their own actions on what they see in them rather than by the Rule itself. It behooves the older members of the Community more than any others to be a living rule, and when their last hour comes, "full days," as the prophet says, "shall be found in them"—*et dies pleni invenientur in eis* (Ps. lxxii. 10).

It is by no means impossible that the monk or nun may feel an involuntary repugnance for the one or other point of the Rule. St. Francis of Sales foresaw this, and with his customary indulgent kindness, he points out its remedy and its reward. Speaking of his Daughters of the Visitation he says:

"If perchance they may sometimes experience disgust or dislike for the Constitutions and regulations of the Congregation, they must act as they would in the case of other temptations, and correct this aversion by reason, and by a good, firm resolution of the higher part of the soul, awaiting the time when God shall give them consolation on their way, as He did to Jacob on his journey, by showing them that the rules and manner of life which they have embraced are in truth the ladder whereby they may, like the angels, ascend to God by charity and descend into themselves by humility."

These last words remind us that St. Benedict made strict observance the eighth degree of humility, reminding us that in this habitual conformity to the Rule in all things we ought to be interiorly actuated by the vivifying motives faith supplies. Strict observance does not

in fact consist in mere outward obedience to the Rule; this would be more befitting the Pharisee than the Christian. The Religious who contented himself with outward observance might indeed be irreproachable in man's sight, but what would he be in God's sight? What glory would he give to God to whom all glory is due? He is a victim before the divine Majesty, but he is so as were the irrational animals sacrificed under the Old Testament. Does not the sacerdotal character which, as St. Peter teaches us, we received in baptism, and which has been confirmed and perfected in us by our religious profession, oblige us, as the same Apostle reminds us, to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God, acceptable to Him by Jesus Christ? (I. Pet. ii. 5.) And when St. Paul exhorts us to present our bodies a sacrifice, does he not say that this sacrifice is to be a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, a reasonable service?

Our sacrifice is spiritual and our burnt-offering is a living one when both the one and the other are animated by the interior spirit of self-surrender. This same spirit will sustain us in the accomplishment of the injunctions of our Rule. We shall endeavor not to lose sight of God's presence and His holy will. We shall think upon our sins, which continually need expiation; on death and the judgment that awaits us. St. Bernard was fond of giving this advice: "In all your actions ask yourself, if I were going to die this day, should I do this? and if so, how should I do it?" The thought of the degree of glory that the faithful soul wins by each of these observances—many of which are apparently the merest trifles—a degree of glory the hope of which inflamed St. Teresa's zeal, this thought may be of great service in helping us to perform each action holily.

But the most perfect and saintly disposition of heart, the epitome of all the rest, is union with Jesus Christ our

Lord. He also performed the greater part of the lowly, obscure tasks we accomplish daily, performed them in the spirit of a victim, at Nazareth, in the sweet society of Mary and Joseph. Oh, how profitable this union will prove to us! We shall then see verified in ourselves St. Bonaventure's words: "The greatest perfection of the Religious is to keep faithfully every point of the Rule."

CHAPTER VI.

ON SILENCE: THE PRAISE GIVEN TO IT BY THE SAINTS. MONASTIC TRADITIONS.

The first of all the regular observances is silence.

We are now about to speak upon a subject singularly attractive in itself, but which it is difficult to treat as it deserves to be treated — silence, sweet, sublime, profound silence! The adorable, the beautiful example of Jesus, our divine Lord, the examples, maxims, encomiums of the saints, all at once rise up before us and present themselves to us as a magnificent whole, and we hardly know how to approach so grand a theme. "Silence is the source of all that is good," said St. Ephrem. The prophet Isaias declares that the service of justice is quietness, and this, in the opinion of the Fathers, signifies that the perfect practice of silence implies, to a certain extent, the perfect practice of every virtue.

First let us pay our homage to the adorable Victim, the eternal Word, the Word of the Father, who, on coming down to earth and offering Himself as a holocaust before the majesty of His Father, the God of infinite sanctity and grandeur, annihilated Himself before Him, keeping silence before Him, absolute, reverential silence; the silence also of humiliation and abasement, for on Him, in His character of victim, the sins of all mankind are laid. The Word is silent; *verbum silens*. This explains His solitude in Mary's womb, in Bethlehem, in the

tabernacle, where no word is spoken to break the profound silence. The God made man is a victim, and the victim holds His peace in the presence of the infinite Being whom He worships. And even when the years of His childhood are past, Jesus speaks but little. His hidden life is a life of silence, and it is prolonged until His thirtieth year, that is to say, for by far the greater part of His mortal life. And during His public life He speaks no superfluous words. At the time of His Passion, the evangelists record that "Jesus held His peace," and we know that, during the solemn hours of His agony upon the cross, He only spoke seven times. Then it was necessary; He was bound to speak and bequeath to us His legacy of love. But now the silence He observes becomes more profound, more wondrous than ever. Behold Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. He is there to be our Friend, our Spouse, the kind Companion of our exile, yet not a single word ever issues from the depths where He is concealed, that by this speechlessness He may give greater glory to His Father, and to us a more impressive lesson.

Jesus was a great lover of silence, and so were all His saints. How seldom Mary spoke! Not a single sentence from Joseph's lips is recorded in the Gospels; we picture him to ourselves as always recollected, always thoughtful. Can we imagine the life at Nazareth to be otherwise than one of silence? Father Surin, S.J., relates that he once met with a young man who appeared to him to have received remarkable lights concerning the life of the Holy Family. He said that in the house of Nazareth St. Joseph seldom spoke, the Holy Virgin spoke still less, and Our Lord least of all. The Incarnate Word scarcely needed words; His looks were more eloquent than speech, and expressed all that He wished to make known to Mary and Joseph.

The ancient Fathers of the desert, the founders of

Orders, saints and servants of God in all ages, felt the need of isolating themselves from creatures by silence; and the better to ensure this isolation of soul, and facilitate converse with God, they sought, in as far as charity and duty permitted, to avoid conversation with men, even on harmless subjects, like David, who said: "I . . . kept silence even from good things" (Ps. xxxviii. 3). Taught by the Holy Spirit, who in the pages of Holy Scripture speaks with abhorrence of the evil wrought by much talking, they thought that the temple of God should be erected within us in silence, as we read in sacred history concerning the Temple at Jerusalem that "when the house was in building there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tools of iron heard." So must the spiritual temple be constructed noiselessly, and the soul, not wasting her strength in the outpouring of words, will be enabled to rise, as it were, to the summit of the mystic structure, her upward progress being commensurate with her abstinence from unnecessary conversation.

All the ancient Fathers speak in praise of silence. Cassiodorus, who for a long time held the highest post at the court of Theodoric, King of the Goths, but left all to found a monastery in Calabria and himself became a monk, speaks thus of the blessings attendant upon holy silence:

"Silence preserves us from many errors and sins into which talking is apt to lead us; it prevents or puts a speedy end to altercations and disputes. It is a note of uncommon wisdom, and enables us to speak with greater grace; it seasons our conversation. It fosters within us good thoughts, is a bulwark against distractions and dissipation; it is an aid to recollection and mental progress. It imparts a taste for spiritual things, facilitates meditation and prayer, unites the soul to God by recollection, renders her attentive to the divine voice that is heard in

secret, and wins for her special graces. Finally, it produces interior peace, and fills the heart with a celestial joy of which the world knows nothing."

The illustrious St. John Chrysostom goes yet further; in his eulogium of silence he almost surpasses himself. Let us listen to his eloquent words:

"Keep silence, brethren; regard it as a strong wall by means of which you will be enabled to conquer temptations; you will have the advantage of them, for you will combat them from a superior position and can trample them underfoot. Keep silence in the fear of God, and the arrows of your enemies will not harm you. Silence, united to the fear of God, is a chariot of fire which will carry you up to heaven like the prophet Elias. Silence is the perfection sought by the recluse, the ladder whereby we ascend to heaven, the road which leads to the kingdom of Christ; it is the parent of compunction, the mirror of the penitent. Silence causes our tears to flow, it engenders sweet consolation, it is the companion of humility, enlightening the mind and imparting spiritual discernment. It is the source of all good; by it we learn the science of the saints, we learn how to pray aright; it soothes the troubled mind and is a tranquil haven when tempests rage around. Its yoke is sweet and delightful; it is a rest to the weary, a consolation to the afflicted. Silence checks the wandering eye and controls the unruly tongue, it restrains the voice of calumny, quells the passions, and awakens the love of virtue. United to the fear of God, it is the firm rampart of the warrior who fights to win heaven. Seek therefore to acquire the better part that Mary chose; she is the model of silence, she sat at the Saviour's feet and cleaved to Him alone."

After hearing all this it is easy to understand why the founders of Orders, desirous of obtaining such blessings for their Institutes, took care to establish the Rule of silence

amongst their Religious. The history of monastic Orders bears testimony to their extreme solicitude in this respect. They did not always deem it necessary to impose the safeguard of enclosure, or to enjoin great austerities on their spiritual sons and daughters, but without a single exception they strenuously, not to say sternly, enjoined the strict observance of the Rule of silence. "This point of the Rule," says St. Chantal, "has invariably been much esteemed and emphatically commended by founders of Orders. Well may they think highly of it, for love of silence is the parent of prayer and the guardian of the heart; and so beneficial are its effects that in order to reform a Community where discipline is relaxed one needs but to enforce the Rule of silence, while to withdraw that obligation would suffice to bring disorder into the best-regulated monastery. Wherever silence is duly observed, an atmosphere of great sanctity will be found to prevail. For these reasons I commend it to you with all my heart."

In our own day, Mère Emilie, whom we are always glad to quote, has well remarked: "Of all the points of the Rule not one contributes as much as silence does to the due observance of the others." And M. l'Abbé Marty, who assisted her so greatly in the foundation of the Congregation of the Holy Family, wrote to a Superior of one of the Houses: "Undoubtedly silence is the soul not only of exterior regularity and strict observance, but of the religious life itself. It is the road by which to attain the end of our vocation, which is perfect union with God."

This idea of perfect union with God as the principal object of the rule of silence reminds one of what St. Jane Chantal said to the nuns of the Visitation: "My daughters, silence is not enjoined only to prevent you from speaking; it is intended as a means of tranquillizing the heart and causing it to rest at Our Lord's feet."

Thus there is a twofold reason why the Religious who

is consecrated to God, who by his profession has surrendered himself as a victim with Jesus before the presence of the divine Majesty, should observe the rule of silence. It is a necessity for him and a duty; it is a necessity, for how could the privileged soul, the victim in God's sight, allow herself to be distracted from the worship of Him who received her vows by useless converse with creatures? It is also a duty, because that soul is bound, in virtue of her character and state of victim, to aim constantly at union with God, at closer, more intimate intercourse with Him; that union which, as we have seen, is the end and object of religious silence, and its reward when strictly observed. Besides the apostle James shows us in so many words how close a connection exists between the religious life, the life of a victim, and the observance of silence, when he says: "If any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue but deceiving his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (James i. 26).

St. Jerome declares that it was this forcible utterance from the lips of the apostle which inspired the recluses of old and the founders of Orders with the idea of imposing the Rule of silence on those who aspired to the life of perfection.

CHAPTER VII.

ON REGULAR SILENCE.

Regular silence, as its name indicates, is that which is enjoined by the Rule. Different names are given to it. There is the strict or great silence and habitual silence; silence in word and silence in movements. In the same way there are some special places where, in their different degrees, silence must be kept more rigorously than in others; for instance, the church, the choir, the sacristy, the refectory, etc. We shall now proceed to speak of exterior silence, viewed under these different aspects.

1. The great silence. This is the silence enjoined on the Religious during the closing hours of the day, the whole of the night, and the next morning until after the meditation or after holy Mass, if Mass follows immediately upon the meditation.

It is called the great silence because it must not be broken without a good reason, and the strict silence because it must only be infringed for a serious matter. It is also called sacred because it is closely allied to mental prayer. St Jerome expresses this in the wording of his Rule: "The holy hermits who dwell in the desert keep the sacred silences (*sancta silentia*) most scrupulously on account of their being the source and parent of holy contemplation."

There is something solemn in the strokes of the bell which gives the signal in Religious Houses for the com-

mencement of the great silence. From the moment it is heard not a sound breaks the stillness of the monastery; its inmates move about with a grave, composed demeanor, the doors are opened and shut carefully and noiselessly. It is as if the spirit of God, penetrating and taking possession of the heart of each one, verified in a striking nay, a visible manner the words of Elias on Mount Carmel: "The Lord is not in the earthquake." "The Lord will bless His people with peace" (III. Kings xix. 11; Ps. xxviii. 11).

These tranquil evening hours and still watches of the night are seasons of special benediction. The rest which the body takes is emblematic of the soul's repose, when she detaches herself more fully from created things and gives herself more completely to God, saying with the Psalmist: "In peace in the selfsame I will sleep, and I will rest" in my God (Ps. iv. 9). The night prayers or the psalms recited in Compline are specially conducive to recollection; the points of meditation which are given to the Community or read by each one individually, according to the custom of the House, furnish the soul with holy thoughts, and the Religious retires to rest, his mind still dwelling on the salutary truths he has just heard. The morning's meditation may be said to be commenced overnight. He says with the Spouse in the Canticles: "I sleep and my heart watcheth." On awaking in the morning his first thought is of the presence of God. The silence observed by the whole Community acts as a safeguard against temptation to voluntary distractions, and when all are assembled in the choir for the first common prayer of the day, one might imagine that heaven had come down to earth to offer to the God of infinite majesty the praise and thanksgiving which are His due.

Let us always entertain the greatest respect for the silence which is truly sacred, the time for which is filled

up with occupations of a heavenly nature. Some fervent Religious have been known to perform acts of heroic patience to avoid breaking that silence. Every monastery records some instance of the kind. It is said that a Visitation nun who fractured her arm just after the great silence commenced, preferred to suffer excruciating pain rather than call one of the Sisters to her assistance. This is somewhat overstrained; we must admire and not imitate, as St. Francis of Sales would have said. In fact no one could fail to admire fortitude and endurance of so high a degree. Nor can one help admiring Mère Emilie, who on hearing one of her daughters groaning at night in acute pain, went to her and sat several hours beside her, endeavoring to soothe her and divert her from her suffering by relating edifying and interesting anecdotes. Toward a novice who wilfully violated the Rule Mère Emilie acted very differently. A young novice, only sixteen years old, forgot herself so far as to say something calculated to make the others laugh, whilst feigning sleep. She was obliged to confess her fault in the refectory. "Sister," the Mother Superior said to her, "you are partly to be excused on account of your youth and your ignorance. Had you been aware of what you were doing, you would have deserved a severe punishment. I hope this will be the last, as it is the first time so thoughtless an act occurs in our monastery. In reparation, you will eat your dinner on your knees for a fortnight, and meanwhile pray God to give you a sense of your duties, to make you love and respect silence, and respect your fellow-Religious, too."

No virtue is at variance with the others; charity and silence can go hand in hand.

2. Habitual silence. This consists in not speaking without necessity except at recreation. The Rule which enjoins this practice also indirectly prohibits any noise calculated to disturb the quiet of the monastery.

If this silence is scrupulously kept, the monastery is like a holy temple where the presence of God is felt. The venerable Foundress whose words and example we delight in quoting, speaks thus of her first companions in the infancy of her Congregation: "It was really touching to see how scrupulously they kept the Rule of silence; even in sickness they avoided breaking it, asking as far as possible by signs for whatever they might want. Such profound stillness reigned throughout the whole house that when M. l'Abbé Marty, our spiritual Father, crossed the threshold, he stopped short, and struck with admiration, said under his breath: 'This is an earthly paradise! All lips are silent, all eyes cast down.'"

There are, however, circumstances when it is permissible, even necessary to speak; when duty, charity, courtesy, or some pressing want obliges us to break silence.

On such occasions the following rules should be followed:

1. Never speak without permission, if it is possible to ask it.

2. If we have not time, or are otherwise unable to go and ask for this permission, let us not take it for granted without good and solid reasons.

3. Let us do our utmost to postpone until recreation-time what at first sight seemed necessary to say at once. Some persons, not excepting Religious, are so unable to restrain their tongue that they mistake for motives of necessity, good breeding, or charity what is in reality want of mortification and levity.

4. It must not be forgotten that the Rule of silence is no less obligatory in our intercourse with our Superior than with the other members of the Community; that is to say in either case one must have a proper reason for breaking the silence.

5. When such a reason exists, let us be brief. More

urbanity of manner and fewer words would be a double advantage; charity and silence would both gain thereby. Garrulity impoverishes the soul. If we knew how pernicious this is, we should try to be laconic in our speech and only say what was necessary.

6. Not only let us be sparing in words, but speak in a low tone. If it is true that a hallowed silence ought to prevail in the monastery, the habit some people have of raising their voice seems almost a desecration of the religious tranquillity which is so pleasing to God.

7. In any case let us be very careful not to cause disedification to any one. St. Paul says: "All things are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things do not edify" (I. Cor. vi. 12; x. 23).

8. We are sometimes advised to make use of signs instead of words if a sign will answer our purpose. This advice is good, as it often serves to prevent an infraction of the Rule. At La Trappe, as is well known, the monks employ no other method of communication. But it is obvious that the sign must express our meaning if it is to be of any use. Here we shall do well to recall St. Chantal's wise remark: "Never make use of signs to the Sisters in the time of silence which are not intelligible. It is much better to say a few words, if necessity requires it, than to make a number of signs which fail to convey your meaning and perhaps only confuse the Sisters and cause them great distractions."

Such are the rules which it will be found useful to follow for the perfect observance of exterior silence. But besides the silence in word, there is the silence in our movements. The rules that provide for this are the same as the rules of religious modesty; yet we think it wise to remind the reader of them, lest anything essential to the practice of regular silence should be omitted.

1. In your general deportment avoid a hurried manner which may have a disturbing effect on those around you. I will give a few details on this point which those who are really in earnest will not consider too minute. There is a way of walking, a way even of using one's handkerchief which does not correspond with the tranquillity of the monastery. There are certain expressions of the countenance and restless movements of the body which are anything but signs of recollection of heart, and are a fertile source of distractions to those who witness them. Can you imagine Our Lord or His blessed Mother behaving thus?

2. Open and shut doors and windows with simple, calm, attentive care to avoid making a noise. Do not push or pull tables and chairs, or any piece of furniture you want to move, but lift them, or get somebody to help you place them elsewhere. By this holy poverty will be the gainer as well as silence.

3. If the doctor, a man of business, or workmen have to be admitted into the house, you will find there is a simple, unaffected way of behaving, decorous and courteous withal, which, without actually asking them to be quiet, will make outsiders feel that they must be careful not to disturb the tranquillity of the monastery more than need be.

How greatly it is to be desired that every Religious should be imbued with profound respect for the silence of the Rule!

Silence ought to be more strictly observed in some places than in others: the church, the chapter-room, the dormitory, the refectory, etc. We will say a few words on this point.

1. The church, the choir, and, in a lesser degree, the sacristy. Is it necessary to explain why silence is to be specially kept in those places? Certainly not. Cassian

praises the monks of Egypt for their strict observance of this rule; for all this innumerous assembly of men, he says, one would think there was but one present, the one who, standing in the middle of the choir, sings the psalm. No one coughs, no one heaves a sigh; and a severe punishment is inflicted on any one who breaks the silence.

2. The dormitory. We have already said enough on the reason why silence is enjoined in the dormitory, when speaking of the great or strict silence.

3. The chapter-room. This has always been held in respect by religious communities, for it is there that they receive counsels, encouragements, salutary reproofs which keep them up to the standard of their vocation; there by self-accusation and the penances given them they expiate their offences, unhappily only too numerous, against the Rule.

4. The refectory. The refectory of a religious House might almost be regarded as a temple, since in it the Religious offers to God a great number of sacrifices by the mortifications he practises and the penances, self-imposed or otherwise, which it is customary in most monasteries to perform there. The monks of old were strict observers of silence in the refectory. An ancient writer thus describes the manner in which the Egyptian coenobites held their repasts: "The silence that reigns in the refectory is so profound that amongst all the monks present—and they are a goodly company—not one is found who ventures to speak a word to his neighbor, or indeed to make any noise whatsoever. When a dish is to be brought in or removed, the monk who presides at the table intimates this by a gentle rap; his voice is rarely heard." The Rule of silence at table is respected in all fervent communities, unless it is set aside for an adequate reason or by some provision of the Rule itself.

The manuals of direction usually enjoin the careful

observance of silence in the corridors and on the stairs, for the sake of the general edification.

Finally, in regard to keeping silence in the infirmary we will quote the following wise remarks which breathe the spirit of faith: "Permission to go to the infirmary must be asked for the sake of visiting the sick out of kindness, and saying a few words to them about holy things. The infirmary is in a certain sense sacred; Our Lord often hallows it by His presence. It might justly be called the antechamber of heaven, for so many of our Sisters have departed thence to enter upon eternity; thence they have winged their flight, as we confidently hope, to the realms of everlasting bliss. Could we allow idle or frivolous conversation in such a place? No, let all we say in the infirmary be on some pious theme. Unless we are on our guard, it may easily become a snare to us, the source of irregularity and sins of the tongue. Alas! we all know what St. James says: 'If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.'" (ch. iii. 2).

CHAPTER VIII.

ON MANUAL LABOR. THE EXAMPLES OF OUR LORD AND OF THE SAINTS.

St. Bernard, who is so great an authority in all matters concerning the religious life, says most beautifully: Labor, seclusion, voluntary poverty, these are the monk's titles of honor, the patent of nobility in the monastic state. *Labor, latebræ, voluntaria paupertas: hæc sunt monachorum insignia, hæc solent vitam nobilitare monasticam.* He mentions labor first for the purpose perhaps of teaching us that it ought never to be an impediment to recollection of heart and exterior silence, nor to the strict observance of holy poverty, as is sometimes unhappily the case if, the work being done without the spirit of religion and with a certain greed of gain, the monastery ends by becoming wealthy. Or perhaps the saint gives the foremost place to labor, because solitude and voluntary poverty are only counsels, whereas the necessity for work rests on a commandment of God, as is shown by the words He spoke to Adam our first father, after the fall: "With labor and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken, for dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return" (Gen. iii. 17, 19).

In designating manual labor as the title to dignity and nobility in the religious state, St. Bernard only embodies in a sentence the monastic traditions and, what is more,

the doctrine of the Gospel. It may prove both agreeable and useful to listen awhile to the teaching of the monks of note in early times and, before all, to learn from the example of Our Lord and His apostles.

When we seek to study the life of perfection in its initial stage, and to discover in what esteem manual labor was held from the very beginning, the first Community that presents itself to our view is the one which the Triune God Himself founded, which for thirty years was the object of admiration and adoration to the angels, and will be for all ages the type and pattern of religious Congregations; the one to which, by reason of its dignity, its exceptional sanctity, and the ineffable charity that united the hearts of its members, we give the name of the earthly Trinity. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, what a sacred community! How wondrous and heavenly was this first monastery! Joseph, the humble Joseph, the just man was (if we may venture to employ ordinary terms in speaking of these holy mysteries) Joseph was the Superior. Mary performed the household duties, supplying the needs of the Holy Family; while Jesus, the Incarnate Word, the eternal God become man for our sakes, represented all those in a religious House whose one duty is to obey; for of Him it is said: He was subject to them.

Now in this house, truly the dwelling-place of God, in this community of holy and sacred persons, the days were spent in prayer, reading, works of charity and manual labor. A considerable part of their time was, we have every reason to believe, devoted to labor, the more so as it did not hinder mental prayer, but, on the contrary, was hallowed and aided by it. Poverty obliged Joseph to work; the Gospels tell us that he ranked as an ordinary artisan. Mary also worked, as we learn from tradition. St. Bonaventure applies to her a word which is used to denote a woman who earns her bread by her daily toil,

quæstuaria. Jesus was also poor, and He employed His divine hands—the hands by which the universe was created—in the rough and arduous toil of a carpenter's shop. It is related that later on, in the period of His public ministry, the Jews, amazed at His marvelous knowledge and doctrine, exclaimed: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and of Simon?" (Mark vi. 3.) And He Himself, the divine Redeemer and King, said in the prophetic utterance of the Psalmist: "I am poor and in labors from my youth" (Ps. lxxxvii. 16).

We purpose in the next chapter to contemplate with adoring gratitude the life of toil and suffering led by the God who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven; at present we merely state the fact that He labored, and point out the existence of the mystery. Early tradition confirms what the prophets, the Gospels assert. St. Justin, who was martyred in the middle of the second century, records that even in his time agricultural implements fashioned by the hands of our divine Lord were still exhibited to the faithful.

After contemplating the sublime community of Nazareth we will proceed to consider those which the apostles formed. They are spoken of as the Apostolic *College*, a term which, applied to them, is almost synonymous with community. Now we know that the apostles labored in the literal sense of the word, even after their vocation to the apostolate and during the days of glory and triumph following upon the Resurrection. Many incidents in the Gospels afford proof of this. They labored by night as well as by day. St. John, relating the apparition of Our Lord on the banks of the sea of Tiberias, says in reference to St. Peter and some of the other apostles: "They went forth and entered into the ship, and that night they caught nothing" (John xxi. 3).

These examples are well worthy of our attention, and well

calculated to silence those who, exaggerating the excellence of the contemplative life, deem themselves justified in shirking the rough work which charity and the maintenance of good order renders necessary in a religious community. Let such persons listen to what St. Paul the great Apostle, called by God to found so many churches, to evangelize so many nations, says in his epistle to the Corinthians: "Even unto this hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked. . . . We labor, working with our own hands" (I. Cor. iv. 12). And again, addressing the clergy of Miletus, he says: "I have not coveted any man's silver or gold, or apparel, as you yourselves know; for such things as were needful for me and them that are with me these hands have furnished" (Acts xx. 34). In writing to the Thessalonians he is still more explicit: "Remember, brethren, our labor and toil, working night and day lest we be chargeable to any of you, we preached among you the Gospel of God" (I. Thess. ii. 9; II, iii. 8).

We learn from the Acts of the apostles what was the work on which the great Doctor of the nations employed his skill; the sacred historian tells us he was a tent-maker by trade. St. Augustine, speaking of St. Paul's manual labor, performed for charity's sake and in the spirit of poverty, supposes him to have turned his hand to any kind of work, honest, useful work, that of common laborers, such as masons, shoemakers, not even despising field work.

St. Benedict recalls these splendid examples to the mind of his monks, and exhorts them to imitate them in these words of his Rule: "Those alone truly deserve the name of Religious who live by the labor of their hands, after the pattern of the apostles and ancient Fathers."

These words from the pen of the great patriarch of the monks of the West render it easy to pass from the example of the apostles to that of the monks of the desert. Here a wide field lies open before us. How grand was the life

of those saintly men who in the solitude and seclusion of the Thebaid and other spots remote from human habitations founded those vast monastic institutions which have handed down their names to posterity! Prayer, penance, chanting the psalms, spiritual reading, such were the habitual, ordinary employments of those fervent coenobites, those saintly anchorites. But how large a proportion of their time was devoted to manual labor, how great a part it bore in their life of penance and atonement! One might be inclined to wonder at this did we not know that this arduous and toilsome exercise appertains to man's condition since the fall, in accordance with the sentence God pronounced, as we have already seen, and these words of Holy Scripture: "Man is born to labor and the bird to fly" (Job v. 7). One needs but to open casually the edifying and interesting annals of the early monks in order to meet with some beautiful and touching examples by which we should do well to model our life, not indeed by imitating them exactly, but by imbibing their spirit, to stimulate ourselves to lead a life of real, assiduous, unremitting work.

Since it is impossible to describe the work performed in all these monastic Institutions, we will afford the reader a glimpse of what went on in one, founded by St. Pachomius, the originator of the coenobitic life.

The monks of Tabenna were all industrious workmen, busily engaged in the various branches of manual labor, which were required for the welfare, the order, and the prosperity of their monastery. A contemporaneous writer, the eye-witness of what he relates, tells us that some tilled the land, others worked in the garden, in the mill, or in the bakehouse. Some plied the arduous trade of the smith, others wove cloth, others tanned leather. Several were employed in manufacturing sandals or making baskets of different kinds.

For the maintenance of order those who worked at the same trade lived together, forming separate families; a Prior was placed over each of these families. The Rule decreed that every monk was to make one mat every day. Those whose time was entirely engrossed by other kinds of work were naturally exempted from this rule; yet such was their love of work, that they found a means of accomplishing the appointed task, making the regulation mat after the day was done.

Besides the regular, ordinary labor, the Religious sometimes had to do extraordinary work. For instance, the Prior would occasionally take a small number to some island in the Nile, or to some neighboring mountain, either to cut the rushes that were wanted for the manufacture of baskets and mats, or to cut wood or collect herbs for use in the kitchen. These excursions sometimes lasted a fortnight.

We have every reason to suppose that the monks of whom we are speaking used, as did the hermits, to place themselves at the disposal of the country people to assist in gathering in the harvest. In putting their hands to such rough and arduous labor, they were actuated by poverty, humility, and charity.

We will not enter in this chapter upon the motives which sustained these servants of God under such fatiguing and strenuous exertion, as we intend to do so in the next. What we have related is only the outcome of the admirable humility, the spirit of perfect penance and atonement which rendered the works of these fervent coenobites so many sacrifices of sweet savor, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Unhappily their life of toil was not imitated everywhere. In the time of St. Augustine there were monks who, under the pretext of more entire abandonment to divine Providence, chose to depend on alms, and refusing

to work, lived a life of idleness. St. Augustine, shocked at such self-delusion on their part, wrote a treatise, entitled: "De opere monachorum," for the express purpose of showing them their error. That he should do so is sufficient proof of the importance he attached to manual labor.

In the following century St. Benedict, the great lawgiver of the monks of the West, was raised up by God to give fresh luster to the religious state. It is well known how emphatically he enjoined manual labor on his disciples in the Rule he drew up.

In the twelfth century St. Bernard reformed the Benedictine Order, the discipline and observance of the Rule having become greatly relaxed. On one essential point of the Rule he laid great stress, and insisted on its revival: the law of manual labor. We have seen that he designated its observance as the monk's patent of nobility. Nor did he content himself with rousing the negligent monks to a sense of their duty by word alone, he set an example to them in person, notwithstanding the delicacy of his constitution and the numerous and pressing demands upon his time and attention involved in the mission he had undertaken.

His biographer relates that when, on account of his weak health, he found work in the harvest-field too arduous and difficult for him, in answer to his prayers, God gave him grace and strength to perform the work easily and well. At other times, if the brothers were engaged in labor that was beyond his powers, grieved at his own impotence to do as they did, he applied himself to tilling the ground, carrying wood, or some other menial work which, without overtaxing his strength, enabled him to keep the Rule of labor.

This fact is all the more striking because, in addition to the great amount of business he had in connection with ecclesiastical affairs, the frequent calls on his time and

thoughts by kings and princes who consulted him about weighty matters, and the extreme delicacy of his health, he was one of the most eminent contemplatives of his age.

Hitherto our illustrations have been borrowed exclusively from the Orders of men, yet the annals of the various Communities of nuns abound likewise in edifying examples, which prove that the Rule of manual labor was adhered to quite as faithfully by the nun as by the monk, although the work in the case of the former was generally of a somewhat lighter description. In the Book of Proverbs it is said of the valiant woman: "She hath sought wool and flax and hath wrought by the counsel of her hands and hath not eaten her bread idle" (Prov. xxxi. 13, 27).

In the monastery St. Pachomius founded for virgins and widows who were desirous of consecrating themselves to God, the work done by the Religious consisted principally in manufacturing linen and woollen material for their own use and for that of the monks.

Yet examples of far more arduous work are not wanting. In the life of St. Euphrasia, who at the age of twelve years renounced the brilliant prospects the future offered her—she was related to the Emperor of Constantinople—and entered one of the numerous monasteries for women in the Thebaid, we read that she strove to perfect herself in humility and penance, and in accordance with the commands laid on her, used to carry heavy stones, to knead and bake the bread for the Community, to cook the meals, to wait at table, to split wood, and carry in the fagots for use in the kitchen. Such were her almost daily occupations; and at a later period the Sisters, who had the opportunity of observing her during a whole year said that they had never once seen her pause in her work to rest.

Those persons might well learn a lesson from this saint,

who, in spite of the austere-looking black veil they wear, in spite of the holy vows they have made to God, seem to expect and require that their birth, their education, their former social position should be taken into account in the convent, and be considered as a reason for exempting them from toilsome or menial work.

In Communities in which the choir nuns are occupied with the education of girls, it need hardly be said that manual labor is to a great extent replaced by the fatigue inseparable from oral instruction; yet not altogether. The spouse of Our Lord would be much to be pitied were she to forget that her divine Master lived for thirty years as a poor and ordinary artisan.

The rough work usually falls to the share of the lay-sisters, the dear lay-sisters! We rejoice to speak of those good souls, who are particularly dear to Our Lord, if they are faithful to the grace of their state and their vocation! They may be the means of bringing down rich blessings on the Community of which they are members, provided they cherish the humble spirit which we admired so much when contemplating the life of the Holy Family at Nazareth. A lay-sister (and we include the portresses or *tourières* under this term), a lay-sister who is humble, modest, self-sacrificing, scrupulously attentive to fulfil all that the holy Rule and obedience enjoins, careful and zealous in cultivating the spirit of charity and maintaining it in those around her, always inclined to think too much consideration is shown her (consideration which is due to her in her character of spouse of Jesus Christ); who is industrious at her work, content with her lowly position, serving Our Lord Himself in the person of His spouses in the light of pure faith, simply and unostentatiously rating herself as inferior to the other lay-sisters, modestly showing kind, discreet attention to newly arrived postulants, so as to encourage and at the same time edify them; a lay-sister,

we repeat, who is animated by such sentiments, is an inestimable treasure to the convent whose inmates she serves. We have, for our consolation, not unfrequently met with these good souls, blest of God, blest by their Superiors. For the sake of their Community one could wish they might never grow old, one could wish them to be immortal, or rather one would wish to see an increase in their number. For the time of their departure must come, as the Holy Spirit Himself declares, "that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them," follow them to eternity.

A lay-sister or portress who is faithful to grace is certainly a great prize in a Community; and she herself enjoys an inward peace which is beyond price. How enviable is her state! She has, it is true, to do the rough work, but she has no heavy cares to trouble and worry her; she will never be placed in a position of authority or be consulted as to the admission of a postulant or the profession of a novice; she will have no voice in the elections, no responsibility as to the general condition of the Community in regard to fervor or the reverse, although she is bound to contribute her share to the general edification. And at the hour of death she will be leniently judged; the strict Judge will not be severe upon her, for He loves simplicity, humility, subordination, unostentations. unfailing devotedness to work, which are the virtues proper to the lay-sister. Yes, the path she treads is a safe, and we may add, a smooth one. No wonder then that on this account, as well as for higher reasons, many persons. generous, holy souls, who occupied an exalted position in the world, have been known to solicit a place among the lay-sisters of a convent, as an honor and special privilege. Mme. Acarie asked and obtained this favor, when, after bringing the Carmelites to Paris, she enrolled herself among the daughters of St. Teresa, and took the white veil under the name

of Marie de l'Incarnation. Another and similar instance occurred recently of one whose ambition it was to be a lay-sister in a Trappist convent, but who was less successful than Mme. Acarie. The reader shall be made acquainted with her story.

One day a young lady of high rank (whose name discretion forbids us to divulge) sought admission into a convent of Trappistines; and in order to obtain her object she concealed the fact of her birth, her education, her fortune. Dressed as an ordinary servant and endeavoring to assume the manners and language of the class to which she represented herself as belonging, she said she was only a poor girl, but she had a good will and hoped to be accepted as a lay-sister. Her modesty, simplicity, her frank, unsophisticated manner were considered as a sufficient recommendation; at the time no further inquiries were made. This divine Providence permitted in order to cause the humility of the new postulant to appear more strikingly. She was accordingly admitted as a lay-sister. But she had left her family without acquainting them with her intention, and the consequence may easily be guessed. Her parents spared no pains to discover her whereabouts, and one day they made their appearance at the convent where she was. At first, in answer to their anxious inquiries, they were told unhesitatingly that their daughter was not in the house. The well-born young lady had not been recognized in the person of the humble postulant. Presently, however, on closer questioning and a more minute description, the secret came out, to the great grief of the pious postulant, who, as her parents did not oppose so pronounced a vocation, was forthwith raised from the rank of a lay-sister to that of a choir nun. She died a few years ago, the then Superior of her convent.

Can we be deemed foolish or mistaken in saying that

no better wish can be formed for the spiritual welfare of a Community than that all the Sisters, even those who hold important offices, may be animated by the lowly, self-sacrificing spirit of a good lay-sister?

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE SANCTIFICATION OF MANUAL LABOR.

THE sanctification of our labor depends entirely on the part which divine grace and the spirit of Our Lord hold in that labor. If that grace, that spirit pervades and animates our manual work, it is hallowed; if not it is useless; nay, it even incurs the risk of being classed with those works to which the prophet Isaias refers when he says: "They have conceived labor and brought forth iniquity" (Is. lix. 4).

There is, in fact, labor that is in a certain sense compulsory, since the only reason for which it is performed is because it is impossible to remain in the Community unless one submits to it, and it is accomplished with no love of obedience, no elevation of the heart to God, no thought of the welfare of the religious House to which one belongs. Now work done in this manner is abhorrent in God's sight. "Thou hast not called on Me, O Jacob," He says by the mouth of His prophet; "neither hast thou labored about Me, O Israel" (Is. xliii. 22); that is to say, in My presence and according to My will.

There is also mercenary or interested labor which is accomplished not with a view to payment in gold and silver, but for the sake of the reward of approving looks and flattering speeches. Labor of this nature savors of the world and is unworthy of a soul who is consecrated to God. There is danger of such work becoming a mere

sham, for when *the master's eye*, as the saying is, unfortunately exercises so great an influence upon our actions, there is every reason to fear that when his eye is no longer upon us we shall lapse into sloth and carelessness. Now what else is it but arrant hypocrisy to appear active and industrious when others can see us, and to give way to idleness when no one is by?

There is also the labor which may be said to be done in a worldly spirit. Vainglory, self-love have much to do with it. It is very pleasant to be thought clever and industrious. What does the Wise Man say? "What hath a man more of all his labor than he taketh under the sun? Behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccles. i. 3, 14). Let us scrutinize our motives and see if some element of self-love or of complacency in our own skill and ability does not interfere with, if it does not actually destroy, the merit of our work. Let us beware of choosing the work for ourselves, for we should naturally be inclined to take that which we like best or think most suitable to our abilities; perhaps we should choose the easiest task, the one requiring least exertion, of a less menial nature than others. Possibly we might succeed better in this self-chosen work than in any other, but the only real success is that which promotes the glory of God and our own sanctification. Alas, it must too often be said of those who appear to do most, as David said of the grass upon the tops of houses: it withereth before it be plucked up: wherewith the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that gathereth sheaves, his bosom" (Ps. cxxviii. 6, 7).

We will now speak of religious labor properly so called, and see how holy it is, how meritorious and pleasing in God's sight. As we said at the commencement of this chapter, in order to be this it ought to be animated by divine grace, vivified by the spirit of Jesus Christ. Now

what is this grace, this spirit? We know that Our Lord labored when on earth; He performed many of the tasks which fall to our share, and by His work He merited for us the precious grace by which our work is sanctified, and to obtain which ought to be our daily prayer. But at the same time that His sacred hands were busy, His Heart, His Sacred Heart was also employed. We can not express the perfection of His inward dispositions, but we may safely affirm that the work to which the divine Redeemer applied Himself was performed in the most exalted spirit and with sentiments which were so many acts of worship, of atonement, of humility, of charity. Let us pause to contemplate and admire the beauty, the grandeur of the feelings that inspired Him.

Our adorable Lord willed to work, and by that work in the first place He intended to show respect to the great work of creation, when His eternal Father called all things into existence. As we are told in the Book of Genesis: God created heaven and earth, "and on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all the work which He had done" (Gen. ii. 2). Our Lord might have done honor to the work of His heavenly Father either by interior acts of praise or of thanksgiving; in fact He did this throughout His whole life, but He desired also to pay homage to Him by external acts, by working in a manner analogous to the work of material creation which it pleased the Most High to perform in the beginning. This reflection may perhaps explain why man, even in a state of innocence, was obliged to work in "the paradise of pleasure, to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. ii. 15). Our Lord desired to manifest in the most complete and perfect manner, both interiorly and exteriorly, His purpose of glorifying His heavenly Father; thus His toil in the workshop at Nazareth may be regarded as a splendid act of homage to His divine

Majesty, a sublime ascription of praise to His creative omnipotence.

Besides this first intention, another motive actuated Our Lord, one which is in more evident accordance with His state and character of a victim for the sins of mankind. The sentence passed upon the first man, after the fall, was this: "In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread." The second Adam, Jesus, the Lamb who bore the sins of the world, would not, in His human nature, be exempted from that law of labor, consequently His youth, up to the age of thirty years, was passed in the lowly, toilsome work of a carpenter's shop. His hands were hardened by the use of the saw and the plane, His youthful shoulders were bent under the weight of heavy planks, and drops of sweat often moistened His brow. Yet there was nothing degrading in these tasks, despite His divine nature, for He, Our God and Our Redeemer, took them upon Himself; and for our salvation, in order to rescue us from the bondage of Satan, He endured fatigue and humiliation. He is a Victim of atonement, and He works like the poorest, meanest laborer. *Nonne hic est faber?* "Is not this the carpenter?" inquired the astonished Nazarenes, unable to fathom this mystery of charity.

Of charity indeed, for it was for us and not for Himself that He toiled; it was to expiate our sins, especially those of sloth and self-indulgence, and it was also to set us an example. Now all this is the work of charity. We imagine also that it was out of love for St. Joseph that He labored, especially when His foster-father was advanced in years; with touching charity Jesus prolonged His hours of toil. We know that He was a devoted and loving son. He worked also for His Mother's sake, to help her and spare her an appearance in public which would have been a trial to her love of solitude and silence. St. Bonaventure asserts that as Mary had no handmaid to carry home the

needlework she had done, Jesus took this office on Himself, making Himself her servant.

Thus the spirit of piety, of atonement, of humility, of charity, combine to render the labor of Our Lord a perfect holocaust, worthy to be regarded with supreme complacency by His heavenly Father. And it is with similar sentiments that the Religious fulfils the holy precept of manual labor, since he is a victim in union with Jesus Christ and in the same spirit. We will enlarge somewhat on this point.

1. The Religious labors in the spirit of piety, according to Our Lord's example, that is to say, he has the intention of venerating the divine condescension of God the Father, who deigned to break the repose of His existence in eternity, to accomplish in time the vast work of creation, of which we ourselves form a part. Are we not, indeed, as various passages of Holy Scripture declare, the work of His hands? "Thy hands," David says, "have made me and formed me" (Ps. cxviii. 73). The Lord hath made all things for Himself, for His honor and glory. The Religious will moreover venerate and adore the labor of Our Lord Himself at Nazareth, for that labor merits our deepest reverence. We are in duty bound to pay Him homage by interior acts of admiration, praise, love, and thanksgiving; but in our external, bodily labor there is a special act of worship which is offered as an oblation to our divine Master, who being Our God is Himself the object of our homage. St. Paul seems to allude to this oblation when he exhorts us to "present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God."

2. The Religious, in union with the adorable Victim, performs his work also in a spirit of atonement. Have we not all need for expiation? We are all included in Adam's prevarication, and the terrible sentence God pronounced in His wrath was passed upon us. We sinned in the

person of our first parents, and their chastisement rests upon us. But is original sin the only guilt that clings to us, is there no other reason in ourselves, in our own life, why expiation is necessary? We have ourselves, by our personal sins and shortcomings, greatly added to the heavy yoke, which, as Holy Scripture tells us, is upon the children of Adam; the retrospect of our past life, as well as the teaching of faith, warns us that we have much to expiate.

Now in the designs of divine mercy, work performed in obedience and in the spirit of faith, is ordained to be an efficacious, perhaps the most efficacious means of expiating our past sins and our daily faults. Only let us labor earnestly as befits those who by their profession have constituted themselves victims, not giving the stern name of work to occupations which are rather pleasant than onerous, which are more of a recreation than real labor. It must not be forgotten that the work of our divine Spouse, from the days of toil at Nazareth to the carrying of the cross on the *via dolorosa*, was that of a victim of propitiation. We are far from wishing to assert that exhausting exertion and excessive fatigue are necessary to the perfection of our life of self-surrender. But at any moment circumstances may arise which may oblige the Religious who has at heart the welfare, the interests of the Community, to undertake tasks more burdensome than is usual, entailing fatigue and physical suffering. Sometimes the suffering is but slight, at other times it is acutely felt, and then it is that the spouse of Him who toiled as a lonely workman, who carried the burden of the cross, is seen more clearly to be a victim of atonement. If under the scorching summer sun the perspiration trickles from our brow; if in winter-time our work compels us to struggle for a longer period than usual against the intense cold; if the work we have to do is specially trying to our patience

on account of the hindrances and difficulties we encounter, particularly if the difficulties are caused by the ignorance, thoughtlessness, or indifference of another member of the Community; if, when we are engaged upon a task which it seems hardly possible to get done within the limited time at our disposal, a wish, perhaps an order, is brought, assigning to us another task of an opposite nature, Our Lord permitting this as a test of our patience; if, overwhelmed by the stress of work, we notice with a perception which seems to be rendered keener, more clear-sighted than usual, as though some malicious sprite sought to torment us; if, I say, we see the others by no means busy, or even at leisure, then a blessed opportunity is given us to render our work an expiatory sacrifice most pleasing in the sight of God, most acceptable to His Sacred Heart.

And if, when our work is finished, it should so happen that, by some involuntary neglect on the part of others, that which appeared to us to require the exercise of an heroic constancy and good will is treated as if it were nothing, and we are even told that we have done nothing extraordinary and make too much fuss about ourselves—and this may to a certain extent be true, seeing how weak we are, and how exhausted by the unwonted exertions we have made—then, if we remain patient, gentle, humble, calm, and always ready to obey; if our patience is supernatural and makes us love our vocation more steadfastly, that patience will be an expiatory sacrifice on which the angels will gaze with delight, I had almost said, with envy.

Various pious practices suggested by the spirit of faith may aid us in strengthening and confirming ourselves in these sentiments during our work; such as the remembrance of Our Lord's labors and sufferings, the thought of the presence of God, reflection upon the four last things, etc. But to enumerate these aids to devotion would lead

us too far afield; besides the pious reader will easily find them for himself.

3. The Religious, in union with our adorable Lord, applies himself to his work in a spirit of humility and charity. Humility and charity go well hand in hand, or more truly, they are inseparable. True humility is always charitable; true charity is always humble. United, they impart to work when done in a religious spirit a dignity, a halo of supernatural beauty which justly claims our admiration. What indeed would the work of the Religious be worth if it were not humble? One might imagine he was ignorant of the fact that we are all, without exception, poor and miserable sinners. Work is a mark of servitude; well, have we not all deserved to wear fetters under the tyrannical dominion of Satan? Let us not deceive ourselves: "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin," Our Lord says (John viii. 34). If we have incurred the penalty of bondage, bondage not only in time but in eternity, labor, hard, strenuous labor is our fitting portion. It belongs to our state, to our condition as sinners. How weighty is this consideration, how well adapted to keep us always in our place, to control our inclinations and likings for this or that work, to incite us to conquer our repugnances, to stifle the movements of self-love.

But work viewed in this light is in its turn an aid to humility. This is what made one of the old hermits, St. Dorotheus, say: "The humiliation of the body produces humiliation of the spirit, and humiliation of the spirit engenders the virtue of humility."

Charity is also the natural accompaniment of the work done by the Religious. What value, what merit would his exertions have without that divine virtue? The Religious does not work for himself but for the Community; were he to work for himself, his ideas, his aims would be sadly perverted. But humility prevents this harking back

to self, and charity urges him to sacrifice himself for the welfare, the relief, the consolation of all the members of the spiritual family to which he belongs. The principal object he has in view is by his work to assist those who in the Community are God's representatives. He would fain accomplish the impossible, multiply his powers, in order by the proceeds of extra work to relieve the anxieties which often weigh heavily on the Superior, especially in the initial stages of a foundation. He knows that the superiors can not share to any great extent in the exertions which tax the physical strength, yet they have troubles, worries, and cares which are more wearing to those who bear them than "the burden of the day and the heats."

If humility and charity are the faithful companions of his labor, the Religious will be only too glad to contribute to the ease of those members of his Community who are tried by sickness or infirmity. It is a grateful thought to the heart of one who is true to his vocation to know that, thanks to his labor, his exertions, his sick or weak brethren need not resume their work until the return of health and strength enables them to do so; that the days of the older inmates of the monastery may be prolonged by the complete cessation of arduous toil. These pious thoughts, permeated as they are with humility, are most pleasing to the Heart of the Most High.

We must here add a remark that is peculiarly appropriate to the age in which we live. We have said how pitiful are the pretensions of one who, having occupied a good position in the world, and had considerable wealth at her disposal, imagines that to be a reason for exempting her from menial work in the convent. Such a spirit is, in fact, most reprehensible. Now, however, we say: Woe betide the Religious who, imbued with no less hateful a spirit, the spirit of the day, which aims at the leveling of classes, which would obliterate all social distinctions,

the distinctions of birth, rank, or other legitimate claims to preeminence, which are in fact ordained by divine Providence! Woe betide the Religious who, contaminated by this proud spirit, has no consideration, makes no allowance for those who have given up all for the sake of monastic poverty and obedience! How blessed of God, on the other hand, is the humble Religious, the lowly lay-sister—for with her we are principally occupied at present—who, filled with respect, deference, self-sacrificing kindness for those of her Sisters who in the world would have been her mistresses, does her work carefully, conscientiously, simply, telling herself it is only right to spare those whose health is more valuable than hers, disliking to see those on a par with herself who in virtue of their birth, education, or rather by the ordinance of divine Providence, would in the world occupy a station far above her.

Such sentiments are admirable, one may almost say heroic; but what reason is there to think they can not become habitual to the privileged souls to whom Our Lord vouchsafes to call His spouses?

Great blessings indeed, blessings of every description are attached to work thus supernaturalized. There are blessings for time, for those who work in this spirit are preserved from dangerous temptations, they enjoy peace of mind and of heart, the joy of a good conscience, the happiness of contributing to the common well-being; and there are blessings for eternity, for it is the lowly, unassuming servant who has been faithful in a little, who will enter into the joy of His Lord. By the lips of the Psalmist the Holy Spirit epitomizes all these blessings in the second verse of the 127th Psalm: "Thou shalt eat the labors of thy hands, blessed art thou and it shall be well with thee." *Labores manuum tuarum quia manducabis, beatus es et bene tibi erit.*

CHAPTER X.

ON THE CHAPTER OF FAULTS.

The chapter of faults is an assembly of all the members of the Community, in which they accuse themselves publicly of the external faults which they have committed against the Rule, the regulations of the House, and the known will of the Superior. These accusations do not comprise interior faults of any kind, but only those which are an infraction of the external order.

This practice has always been much esteemed in fervent Communities. It is as ancient as monasticism itself. St. Basil expressly enjoins it in his Rule, and St. Antony would even have had it include faults of thought as well as of deed. This practice, however, has never obtained.

We have no intention of enumerating the various faults which are transgressions of the monastic rules. Every Community has its own *directorium*, or book of customs, indicating these faults for the purpose of assisting the Religious to make his or her examination.

Nor is it necessary to describe the manner of conducting the chapter of faults, the forms observed, the order in which the Religious come forward, the formula of self-accusation, the recommendations, etc. With these every Religious is perfectly well acquainted; besides they are not the same everywhere. What it behooves us to speak of are the dispositions wherewith the declaration of faults is to be made, so as to derive the greatest spiritual profit from it. The exercise is a most useful one, if performed in the right dispositions.

First of all let the Religious prepare carefully for the self-accusation he is about to make, in order that it may be correct, thoroughly humble and perfectly simple. If he does it in this spirit, when he kneels down to accuse himself, his declaration will have much the same effect as that of the Sacrament of Penance, although it is no sacrament.

Let him then stand forth before his brethren, bearing his humiliation in the same posture of mind as the adorable Victim Himself, who never ceased to feel the inward shame attaching to His character of a victim of atonement, acknowledging that on Him were laid the sins of the world, and on the strength of that conviction, prepared to bear all manner of pains and penalties. The Religious will find this humble, loving union with Jesus as a victim a source of strength, supposing that nature shrinks from the statement of his faults. Surely he will have courage, if Jesus humbled Himself for love of us, to humiliate himself out of love for His divine Master, to cultivate an interior and exterior likeness to Him by an act which is notably that of a victim.

Another consideration which will prove of signal assistance to him in profiting by the declaration of faults, is this: that it would not be too great a penance for our sins were we obliged to confess them all publicly, even the most secret and disgraceful ones. And the Religious ought to repair to the chapter resolved to do so, should obedience (to put an impossible case) require it. Thus disposed he will make his self-accusation of the faults which are only external infractions of the Rule with all the more modesty, sincerity, and humility.

We now come to the declaration itself. In prostrating ourselves before our Superior, let us call to mind Our Lord in the Garden of Olives, lying prone upon the earth, lost in self-abasement before the majesty and sanctity

of His Father. How acutely He felt the shame of sin, how intense was His abhorrence of sin, how ardent was His desire to make satisfaction to the just wrath of His heavenly Father! Let us deeply imbibe these sentiments and make our self-accusation in a quiet, well-modulated voice, in a humble yet intelligible manner, avoiding all peculiarities and exaggeration, only intent on atoning for our faults to the edification of the Community.

If perchance one of the external faults of which we accuse ourselves is merely an oversight, which can scarcely be said to be blameworthy, no matter; we must accuse ourselves of it quite frankly, without even appearing to attempt to excuse ourselves. For if this fault is not reprehensible in God's sight, how many others are so, faults of which the Community knows nothing. The humility which prompts us to accept undeserved blame will earn for us mercy and the pardon of many other faults known only to Him who searches all hearts. Moreover, good examples are all-important to the Community, and we are expected to give edification. If therefore we have caused disedification, let it be seen that we regret our fault, and if we love our brethren and our Order, our regret will be real and heartfelt.

As a general rule after the declaration of faults come the recommendations. These are the accusations publicly brought by the other brothers against the Religious who has been accusing himself, and who remains kneeling in the midst of the assembly. These accusations likewise are confined to faults against the Rules of the house, and are usually very ordinary and common ones. This fresh trial may be a source of great grace to the Religious who listens to the charges brought against him, and to all the Community who are witnesses of the humility and simplicity wherewith he receives these accusations.

It is scarcely necessary to say that they ought to be

made only from the twofold motive of charity toward one's neighbor and the zeal with which every religious ought to be animated for the maintenance of regular discipline.

The monks of old, more simple perhaps than we are, held very much to this declaration of faults; they were convinced, as St. Bonaventure says, that the Communities most deserving of admiration are not those in which no faults are committed, for that can not be, but those in which faults are corrected most thoroughly.

St. Bernard speaks with authority when he says: "Let no one take it into his head to conceal the faults of others; let no one say: Am I my brother's keeper? Let no one show indifference if he sees the good order of the Community likely to be disturbed, monastic regularity and discipline endangered. For by silence one gives consent to the irregularity, if it is one's duty to disclose and denounce it, since we know that the same punishment is laid up for him who commits the fault and him who connives at it."

Thus the accusations have been instituted to promote the welfare of the Orders and of each of the members composing them.

But in what dispositions ought they to be received? This is preeminently the time when one must in all humility and simplicity of faith contemplate our adorable Lord, who took upon Himself the sins of the world, and who, during His Passion, had a number of misdeeds and crimes brought against Him. St. Bernard expressly counsels us to do this. Jesus held His peace, the evangelists tell us. "He shall be led," the prophet Isaias says, "as a sheep to the slaughter, and He shall not open His mouth" (ch. liii. 7). What was the reason of this silence? Why did the divine Victim endure this interior and exterior shame without speaking a word? Was it not because He knew that having taken upon Himself the sins of all

mankind, He deserved on that account all the insults, all the accusations that were brought against Him? If therefore we are so happy as to appreciate the grace of our vocation, we shall listen in humility of heart to the accusations of our brethren; in the first place because being sinners ourselves we ought to wish, for truth's sake, that others should know us for what we are; and in the second place, because as Religious we should consider ourselves bound to make atonement for the sins of the world.

The Religious who feels thus will be grateful to his brethren for accusing him of his faults; and if it happens that mistakenly, or perhaps purposely (which God forbid!) he is falsely accused, let him bear it as becomes one who is a sinner.

When the declarations and the recommendations are finished, the Superior gives the Religious, who is still on his knees, whatever penance he thinks right. Sometimes he adds a few words of correction or rebuke. Self-love must be destroyed; and if it does not receive its deathblow, it certainly is due to no fault on the part of the saints and founders of Orders, seeing what means they have devised in order to reduce it to its last gasp.

The Religious who is eager to grow in the grace of his vocation will derive from this exercise an increase of spiritual consolation. He rejoices to be treated in this manner, and thanks God that justice is administered so mercifully here below. At the same time humility strikes deep root in the upturned soil of his soul. He rises from his knees strengthened and encouraged for the performance of his sacred duties, and carries away with him his penance as a precious treasure which he will employ for the greater perfection of his life of self-surrender, and the reprimand as a useful lesson on which his thoughts will dwell lovingly, and by which he will regulate his conduct.

Thus his brethren will be edified and the angels filled with admiration.

But in proportion as such sentiments are edifying and admirable, the contrary ones are odious and contemptible. It is with reluctance that we speak of them, even briefly. There are, however, some ill-conditioned Religious who listen to the accusations of their brethren, the reproof of their Superior, in a spirit of foolish pride and want of charity, and not venturing to complain or protest, they keep silence, humble themselves exteriorly, while interiorly, abusing the grace by which they ought to profit, they *pose as victims*, victims hateful in God's sight, proud and misguided victims, deserving of compassion from every point of view. How baneful is such a spirit, hideous and repulsive as leprosy! Alas for the Religious who feeds on such poison! He imagines himself to be a victim, but a victim is humble and simple and never considers himself to be sufficiently humiliated and chastised. A true victim always agrees with those who accuse or condemn him; he invokes blessings on them for acting so kindly and charitably toward him; hence his soul is always tranquil and at rest. The other, on the contrary, turning the divine remedy into poison, only prepares sorrow and suffering for himself in time and perhaps a miserable fate for eternity. May the God who received the vows, the oblation of such unhappy souls at their profession, have compassion on them and restore to them, with the grace of their vocation, the substantial happiness of humility.

As for the Religious who take no part in the chapter of faults, either in the self-accusation or the accusation of others, let them make the declaration silently in tacit union with their brethren, accusing themselves with them, and accepting as if due to themselves the penances and reproof given to those who are privileged to accuse themselves openly.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE PENANCES PERFORMED IN COMMUNITY.

The penances which form part of the Rule in religious Congregations may be divided into two classes: those in which all the Community take part, either in public or otherwise, such as fasts, disciplines, etc., and others which are performed only by one or more of the Religious in presence of the whole Community, these being either the penances imposed in the chapter of faults or on occasion of some casual fault, or merely by permission of the Superior.

Penances of this nature, which we designate as penances performed in community, are the only ones which will occupy our attention in this chapter; but what we say concerning the dispositions in which they ought to be performed will, of course, apply equally to all kinds of mortifications.

These penances date from the earliest times, and they have every claim to our respect as having contributed to the sanctification of many a saint; and if some of them appear to be out of keeping with the spirit of our times, it is the levity of this degenerate age that is at fault, not the admirable simplicity of our predecessors in Religion. However the selfsame penances bequeathed to us by the example of the ancient Fathers are still practised, and with the same pristine simplicity, in all Congregations, provided the spirit of the Order and independence of the exigencies of the age permit of their adoption.

As a rule they take place in the refectory, sometimes in the chapter-room, or to the inside door of the church or of the choir.

In general they are physically painful as well as humiliating. Some are only humiliating, in order that all the Religious may take part in them, whatever the state of their health.

We shall speak first of all of the dispositions essential to the right performance of these penances; afterwards we shall enter somewhat into detail respecting the principal penances in use in religious Communities.

A fervent Religious will always set himself with a good will to accomplish the penances imposed by the Superior, either in the chapter of faults or because of some incidental infraction of the Rules, some cause of disedification, or disturbance of the regular order. He will not show the slightest sign of repugnance, however ignominious the penance may be, because, through the effect of divine grace, he does not in reality feel any voluntary aversion to it.

He also accomplishes it with punctuality, exactitude, and simplicity, being careful to adhere closely to what obedience or custom prescribes. He detests all kind of singularity. Humiliation is to him nothing more or less than a means of acquiring humility. He even experiences a certain spiritual joy in doing penance, remembering what St. Paul says of our adorable Lord: *Proposito sibi gaudio, sustinuit crucem, confusione contempta.* "Who having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. xii. 2).

Moreover these dispositions of promptness, exactness, humility, gladness derive their reality and their strength from union with our dear Lord in His victim's life of self-oblation; and our penances are nothing but a faint reflection of His humiliating and bitter Passion. Who could ever estimate aright the intense suffering, the awful

ignominy of that adorable Passion! Who could realize all that was involved in the cruel flagellation, the crowning with thorns, the insults and derision, the white robe, the purple mantle, the blindfolding, the spitting upon His sacred countenance! Alas, my God, how effeminate we are! Miserable creatures that we are, we shrink from letting others see us humiliated, we are ashamed of doing penance which we think will lower us in the eyes of our brethren. What is all we do but child's play compared with the ignominy, the torture inflicted on Our Lord! But we will unite our penances to His, we will accomplish them in honor of His infinite objection, we will vivify them with that spirit of sacrifice which animated Our Redeemer in His endurance of humiliations and sufferings on so vast a scale; like Him, when doing what mortifies our pride and our sensuality, we will cherish a profound abhorrence of sin, a fervent desire to expiate it, a generous eagerness to render to God the glory of which our sins and the sins of mankind have deprived Him; let us do this, and all our penances, be they ever so mean, ignominious, grievous, will be not only tolerable but desirable, and prove a source of sanctification and merit.

We shall now enter into fresh details on this subject and mention some of the chief penances done in Community.

These are principally: To pray with one's arms extended in a cross, to kiss the feet of the Brothers, to kiss the ground, to beg for one's meals in the refectory, to lie prostrate at the door of the refectory or of the choir.

To pray with one's arms extended is a touching act, since it forcibly recalls the painful attitude and the prayers of Our Lord upon the cross. The Religious who performs this penance ought to keep his mental gaze fixed on his divine Exemplar, the victim offered up on Calvary, who, during three long hours of excruciating agony remained

with arms outstretched, nailed to the cross of shame, imploring mercy and pardon for unhappy sinners in general and for us in particular. What petitions did He address to His Father in heaven, justly angered, but willing to be propitiated! How anxious He was to make atonement! how intense was His hatred of sin, His desire to save souls! Let the lowly Religious strive to enter into the mind of the Redeemer and entertain similar sentiments when he prays with arms outstretched in the presence of his brethren.

The posture he adopts on this occasion will also remind him that he ought himself also to be truly crucified by mortification and obedience. By exhibiting himself thus to his fellow-Religious, he manifests his contrition for having given so poor an example of the virtues essential to the Religious, and his purpose for the future to seek to say with the Apostle: *Christo confixus sum cruci.* "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Gal. ii. 19).

The penance which consists in kissing his brethren's feet will recall to his remembrance that Our Lord, on the eve of His sacrifice, knelt before His apostles and washed their feet, as if He intended this to be the preliminary act of the great drama to be enacted on Calvary on the morrow. What infinite self-abasement on His part! And how touching to behold Him rendering this menial service to Judas! Let the Religious kneel at the feet of each one of his brethren, animated by the spirit of charity and humility wherewith Our Lord was actuated; let him kneel at their feet, not only in deed whilst performing his penance, but remain there in spirit, acknowledging in all sincerity that he is not worthy even of so humble a place.

At the same time let him raise his heart to God, humbly asking pardon for the bad example he has given to his brethren, for his ill-judged acts, his impatience and rash judgments.

Or again, he may behold Our Lord in each one of his brethren, and enter into Magdalen's feelings when she kissed the sacred feet of Jesus, and bathed them with her tears.

When he is ordered to kiss the ground, let him do so with the intention of honoring the humiliation of Our Lord, who, being in the glory of the Father, came down to earth to appear amongst us, as the prophet says, "as a worm and no man" (Ps. xxi. 7); or let him think upon the Redeemer prostrate upon the earth in the Garden of Olives, or falling beneath the weight of the cross on His way to Calvary.

If the penance to be done consists in prostrating one's self at the door of the choir or refectory while the Community are passing, let us remember the humiliation Our Lord endured in being in a certain sense excluded from heaven, and on account of having taken on Himself the sins of mankind, regarding Himself as unworthy to enter again into His glory until He had suffered the cruel death of the cross, as He Himself told the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. Again, one may find it useful to think of the humble penitents in the first ages of Christianity who implored with tears and entreaties the intercession of the faithful, to obtain for them forgiveness of their misdeeds and the privilege of re-admission to the assembly of the Christians.

The act of begging one's meals in the refectory may remind us that Our Lord endured hunger and thirst, that He lived upon alms, and that, as tradition records, more than once He begged His bread, both when in Egypt, and during the three days of His loss in Jerusalem when He was twelve years old. In the selfsame spirit of humility wherewith He was animated we appeal to the charity of our brethren for the food necessary for our sustenance, acknowledging ourselves to be unworthy to sit at table

with the children of God, unhappy prodigals who have wasted our portion of Our Father's substance.

Sometimes a Religious is condemned to take his repast apart from the others, sitting on the ground; in that case let him entertain the same spirit of humility. It is said of St. Francis of Assisi that one day whilst at table, his thoughts recurred to the divine Infant at Bethlehem, lying on straw in the manger; he forthwith rose from his place and seated himself on the floor, saying: "How can I eat my dinner sitting comfortably at the table, when my Saviour was laid on a bed of straw?"

There are many other penances in use in religious Communities, but it is superfluous and indeed inadvisable to enumerate them here. The essential point is that the spirit of faith should pervade and vivify penitential practices which in themselves are valueless, and sometimes may even appear strange. But what can be called strange which is done for Christ's sake, and in imitation of His state of humiliation and abjection? Can we, in performing these humiliating acts, equal the ignominy endured by Our God? And is our self-love so far from being extinguished that we must needs still treat it with consideration?

Let us then accomplish our penances humbly and bravely, saying with the Royal Psalmist: "Before the Lord who chose me . . . I will both play and make myself meaner than I have done, and I will be little in my own eyes and . . . I shall appear more glorious" (II. Kings vi. 22).

CHAPTER XII.

ON RELIGIOUS MODESTY.

Modesty is a moral virtue which regulates the whole exterior of the Religious for the edification of his neighbor.

All the virtues are befitting to the Religious, but of modesty one may say that it is identical with the state he has embraced. In fact, is it not true that the very idea we conceive of one who is consecrated to God is the idea of a person who is modest and unassuming; and that when we speak of the manners, the deportment, the demeanor of a Religious, it is the same as if we said a modest manner, a modest deportment, a modest demeanor?

This fact is worthy of note. Whence is it that so close a connection exists between these two terms? Undoubtedly it is because the Religious, being, in virtue of his profession, entirely dedicated to God, and a real victim before His divine Majesty, a victim never released from the altar of sacrifice until his holocaust is consummated, lives in a continual sense of God's presence. Now the reader will understand that this divine presence has the direct effect of impressing on those who live in it that exterior modesty which we so much admire in them, for the sense of God's presence is the source and principle of all true modesty.

Furthermore, this divine presence is felt to a certain extent by the persons who hold intercourse with Religious who are faithful to the grace of their vocation; and here

we see the verification of St. Paul's words; for these holy souls "glorify and bear God in your body" (I. Cor. vi. 20); they obey his exhortation: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. xiii. 14). The sight of such persons is indeed most impressive and edifying.

The first characteristic of modesty is simplicity. Modesty, says St. Ambrose, should be simple and natural; if it were forced and affected it would be most displeasing. It is clear that modesty must be simple; one can not imagine anything else; any element of mannerism, affectation or pretentiousness about it would render it hypercritical and intolerable. Just as the truly modest Religious edifies and gladdens all with whom he lives, so one whose modest exterior is only due to a false and feigned humility is disliked by all around him.

The Religious who is truly modest is simple, because, as has already been said, he is peacefully conscious that God's eye is continually upon him, and this consciousness renders him always equable, always alike well-behaved, punctual, in fact all that a Religious ought to be either in the company of others or when alone in his cell.

He is simple because he has one single aim, that of pleasing God, in whose sight he lives, to whom he pays faithful, respectful homage. Remembering that Our Lord said: "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. v. 16). The Religious has the general edification at heart, and he fulfils this duty of giving edification far better by his modesty than by an austere life and rigid exactitude; but in all he seeks God's glory alone. Of the respect which can not fail to accrue to him on account of his conduct, he takes no heed. He is a victim laid on the sacrificial altar; his posture, his state have reference to God only, and the incense burned in his honor consequently ascends to God; the faithfulness with which he

performs all that his character of victim demands of him only tends to God's greater glory. Every one perceives this character and does so all the more clearly because his perfectly unassuming manner proclaims it; all his thoughts are of God, to whom he offers his holocaust.

In this do we not see the liberal fulfilment of St. Paul's admonition to the Philippians: "Let your modesty be known unto all men; the Lord is nigh" (Phil. iv. 5).

True modesty is simple, and in its simplicity altogether supernatural. Not indeed as we see it sometimes shown by persons in the world, who are naturally modest; and consequently manifest it outwardly; it is wholly and solely by the grace of Jesus Christ that the Religious displays this virtue. He only desires to resemble thereby his divine Lord, for he knows, as St. Gregory Nazianzen says, where Christ is, there modesty will necessarily be. This fair virtue was specially dear to Our Redeemer; it shone forth in a wondrous manner in His person, His words, His bearing, His behavior, and His gentle, unassuming manner was the means of leading unhappy sinners to approach Him with confidence, of drawing the multitudes after Him. St. Paul seems to intimate this when, desirous of obtaining what he asked from the Corinthians, he said: "I beseech you by the mildness and modesty of Christ" (II. Cor. x. 1).

"When I think of Jesus," says St. Bernard, "I picture to myself a man who is meek and humble of heart, kind, temperate, chaste, compassionate, who shall not break the bruised reed, nor extinguish the smoking flax; who is neither gloomy nor hasty, whose speech is without bitterness, whose conversation is never wearisome; a most agreeable companion, in whose society one feels cheerful and happy." What is this but the portrayal of modesty in its perfection?

The Greek poet Euripides (if we may quote a heathen

author) designates modesty as the most perfect of the gifts of the deity; now Jesus Christ is the most perfect gift of the Deity; He is modesty personified. Again we say with St. Gregory: *Ubi Christus, ibi modestia.*

Now the good Religious has this great Exemplar ever before his eyes. He desires to bear His likeness in the sight of God and man; he desires to be clothed with the modesty of his divine Master as with a garment, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, as St. Paul would have us do; he wishes for no other ornament, no other glory, for he knows, as the same Apostle tells us, that modesty is one of the chief adornments of the elect, holy and beloved of God (Col. iii. 12).

Viewed in this light, modesty is one of the principal sources of blessing to a Religious House. A few devout souls who practise it in its perfection are enough to impart a fragrance to the whole Community; as it were to compel their fellow-Religious to imitate so fair, so attractive an example. St. Jerome says: "The presence of Religious who are truly modest is a constant lesson in regularity, recollection, silence, to those who do not practise sufficient self-control in speech and action. They are the means of filling the cloister, of maintaining the standard of holiness, because their example stimulates devotion in others and inspires them with a longing for heavenly things." Yes, it may well inspire a longing for heavenly things, since modesty is in truth a reflection of celestial beauty; and if we could imagine an angel come down to earth and dwelling among us, he would be in features, in mien, in his whole exterior an embodiment of modesty. The description of a visit paid by Pope Innocent II. to the Abbey of Clairvaux in 1131, illustrates what has been said. The historian says:

"The virtuous Pontiff was extremely gratified by the simplicity, the religious cordiality of his reception. The

monks came to meet him, poorly clad, bearing a wooden cross of no very elaborate workmanship, chanting in subdued and solemn tones befitting an Order of penance. All the members of the Pontifical Court who accompanied the Pope were struck by the grave demeanor of the monks the atmosphere of sanctity that surrounded these men, who led on earth an angel's life; tears flowed from the eyes of the attendant prelates, while the monks, on whom the gaze of all was bent, kept their eyes fixed on the ground, not once raising them to look upon a spectacle calculated to excite their curiosity and interest in a high degree."

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE RULES OF RELIGIOUS MODESTY.

The forming of a Religious is a great work, not only when it is a question of his interior spiritual training, which consists in the cultivation of virtues such as self-denial, humility, etc., but also in as far as it is necessary to teach him to acquire habitually that sedate and edifying exterior deportment which is known as religious modesty, and which is not less essential to the perfection of his state.

The task is undoubtedly a long, a difficult one; it is not enough, as St. Augustine says, that all about the Religious, his bearing, manners, movements, should be in keeping with the state he has embraced; this perfect modesty must become a second nature to him.

We will give some rules for the benefit of the reader on exterior modesty; they are taken for the most part from the writings of the saints, especially those of St. Ambrose, St. Bernard, and St. Bonaventure. The rules consist of very simple details, in which there is nothing that could be called extreme.

I. *On the Expression of the Countenance and General Demeanor.*

1. Let the expression of your countenance be serene, frank, sympathetic, and in general cheerful rather than sad.

2. Endeavor to let your looks be expressive of gentleness, kindness, and a certain reserve.

3. Do not allow your eyes to wander, casting restless glances on one thing and another.

4. Do not fix your eyes in a manner that might be called a stare on the individual to whom you are talking.

5. Observe custody of the eyes, especially if conversing with a person of the other sex, but let it be in a well-bred manner, not in a marked way so as to attract notice.

6. In general cast your eyes down, but without affectation or constraint.

7. Hold your head up, slightly bend forward, but do not throw it back or to one side without necessity.

8. Do not turn your head about hastily and quickly.

9. Never allow yourself voluntarily to betray by play of feature what is passing within, a movement of passion, or the disgust and aversion you may feel.

10. Be careful not to use your handkerchief or clear your throat in a noisy and obtrusive manner.

11. When standing up, stand upright in a natural, not forced manner.

12. Do not be always shifting your place and changing your position.

13. When seated, do not lean back or to one side if you can help it, and do not assume a careless or too easy posture.

14. Do not cross your feet, but place them side by side.

II. *On Deportment.*

15. Do not walk hurriedly, unless there is some good reason for haste; nor in a pretentious and stiff manner.

16. Avoid at the same time a slow, dragging step.

17. Keep your hands still if they are not doing anything.

18. Do not put your hands to your face or to your head, nor into your pockets, but keep them in the sleeves of your habit or under your scapular, as the Rule may direct.

19. Do not lay your hand on any one, either playfully or familiarly.

20. Keep your arms and head still unless there is any reason for moving them about.

21. Do not, when ascending the stairs, take two steps at a time.

III. *Rules for Recreation.*

22. On going into recreation avoid showing a sense of relief at emancipation from restraint and pleasure at the unloosing of your tongue.

23. Beware alike of talking too much and observing a forced silence.

24. Speak in a quiet, gentle tone; let your voice be well modulated.

25. Let your age and the rank you hold regulate the part which you take in conversation.

26. Never interrupt any one who is speaking, especially if it be one of your Superiors.

27. Never argue, but give a pleasant turn to the conversation if it becomes disputatious.

28. When a question is addressed to you, do not answer quickly and thoughtlessly without allowing the speaker time to finish.

29. Never show signs of self-assumption or temper, or allow it to be seen that you are ill at ease.

30. Never talk about yourself for good or for evil, or dwell upon your infirmities or afflictions.

31. In conversation do not put forward your own country, your family, your acquaintances, and friends.

32. Avoid sneers and sarcastic speeches as something detestable.

33. Do not allow yourself to let slip a vulgar expression or jest, or to talk about worldly matters.

34. If you narrate a pleasing or amusing incident, do so quite naturally and simply.

35. Do not attempt to be witty at another person's expense, nor think yourself clever for a play upon words.

36. Do not indulge in loud and immoderate laughter.

IV. *Rules for the Refectory.*

37. Make it your habit to keep your eyes cast down.

38. Do not allow yourself to speak, but make use of signs.

39. Do not look eagerly at the dishes on the table or at those which are brought in afterward.

40. Do not eat quickly or with avidity, but observe the rules of good breeding.

41. Do not allow your liking for or aversion to any dish that is served be apparent to others.

42. Do not take upon your plate more than you want, lest it be wasted.

43. Take care not to waste so much as a morsel of bread.

44. If the reader makes a mistake do not show by word or gesture that you noticed his mistake.

45. If you wait at table, observe in your manner and movements the rules already given.

V. *Rules for the Church.*

46. Let the gravity of your countenance, your downcast eyes, your folded hands testify to the spirit of faith and piety wherewith you are, or ought to be animated.

47. Make your genuflections reverently, without the deliberation that savors of affectation.

48. When in your place avoid every unnecessary movement.

49. If you suffer from cold or heat, do not let this be apparent.

50. Do your part in the ceremonies of the choir with exactitude and uniformity.

51. Keep profound silence, moving about noiselessly.

52. Whatever your interior fervor may be, do not let it appear in your manner of chanting, or by the sighs you heave.

53. When no service is going on, refrain just the same from letting your eyes wander or speaking needlessly; let your behavior be always in keeping with the sanctity of the place.

Such are the chief rules of religious modesty. It is not necessary, as the reader will perceive, to make heroic efforts in order to observe them, but constant and careful vigilance over one's self is required. This vigilance alone would perhaps scarcely be enough. One rarely finds perfect modesty in persons who live in the world, even the most fervent and devout; in religious houses, however, watchfulness over one's self finds great assistance in the many means provided to render it effectual. One of the best means of acquiring modesty, says a learned writer, consists in having faithful monitors about us who observe all we do, and who tell us whenever we transgress the rules of this virtue. Now there is no lack of such monitors in a religious Community. Our Superiors have their eye continually upon us, ready to warn or reprove us, and our fellow-Religious are also prompt in rendering us this important service.

What we are about to say concerning mutual charity will prove that we can with all certitude count on their kindness and devotedness in that respect

CHAPTER XIV.

ON MUTUAL CHARITY. THE EXCELLENCE OF THIS VIRTUE.

Modesty is the ornament of religious Communities; the common life, the spirit of strict observance, are its safeguard and the source of its prosperity; obedience is its strength, chastity its glory, poverty its riches, and mutual charity its joy and happiness.

Quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum! How delightful it is for brethren who have but one heart and one soul to live together, to sanctify themselves together, and together to anticipate, when this exile shall be ended, the bliss of their true country!

Then it is, under these happy circumstances, when the heart and soul of all are united in charity, that we may echo St. Bernard's words: *Religio, vita beata, vita angelorum! vere claustrum, vere religio est paradisus!* "The religious life, how blessed a life, the life of angels! The cloister, the religious state is a paradise!" It is the camp of God fortified on all sides by holy discipline, the dwelling-place of the Most High, the gate of heaven.

We are about to speak of mutual charity, of its excellence, and of its works. One is inclined to exclaim: What more beautiful theme could you choose? Yet all the virtues are so attractive, so lovely, so fascinating, that as each in turn comes under our notice we are ready to say: What can be more lovable? However, it must be ac-

knowledged that charity is the greater. *Major autem horum est caritas.*

The excellence of charity. Charity toward God and charity toward our neighbor are not two distinct virtues, but one and the same; and this virtue is a communication of and participation in the charity wherewith God loves us and loves Himself. The selfsame divine and eternal fire which inflames the divine Persons of the Most Holy Trinity is poured forth upon us, and this fire is the love of Our God, His love for our souls. This sacred fire kindles within us love for Our God and extends that love to our brethren, and our brethren are in like manner inflamed with that same love for us; thus the selfsame fire of charity at one and the same time inflames and consumes God, who is its Author, and our souls, who are its object; every soul, in fact, who willingly subjects herself to its sanctifying action. This is why St. John simply says: "God is charity" (I. John iv. 16); it is the reason why all the works of God, creation, preservation, redemption, sanctification, glorification, are extolled, times without number in Holy Scripture, as the work of divine charity; and again, why the first commandment is to love God, and why the second, which is like to the first, is to love our neighbor. All, therefore, is epitomized in charity, all is ended and consummated in charity. Faith and hope tend to charity; all the virtues are perfected in charity. To quote the passages in the Old and New Testaments, in the writings of the Fathers, which proclaim this doctrine, would be an impossible task. "He that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him," says St. John. Again and again he tells us that the surest proof of our love for God is our love for our neighbor. When shall it be given us fully to comprehend the full beauty of this divine, this incomparable virtue, the focus and the consummation of all other virtues?

Let us contemplate and adore the divine beauty of charity as we see it in Our God, Our Saviour, and Our Victim; let us adore it in His heart, in His acts, in His words.

"Behold this Heart which has so loved men!" "He loved me," says St. Paul, "and delivered Himself for me" (Gal. ii. 20). "Who hath loved us," St. John says, "and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Apoc. i. 5). His sacrifice of Himself was universal, absolute; it is for all eternity, and His Sacred Heart, the furnace of charity, is the source of that infinite sacrifice; the flame that consumed the holocaust was infinite charity. Would that it were given us "to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height of the charity of Christ," the charity beyond compare of the Heart of our blessed Lord and Saviour.

Let us contemplate and adore this charity as displayed in His actions.

It would indeed be impossible for us to enumerate the acts of charity which He made for us since the Incarnation up to the present time, when He abides with us under the veil of the Eucharist; that were a task beyond the power of angels to accomplish. Let us rather unite with them, and above all unite with Mary, the true, the perfect victim of the Sacred Heart, to pay our tribute of adoring love. We will, however, devote a few moments to the contemplation of the proofs of love which He vouchsafed to give to man during His public ministry.

We see Our Lord in contact with all manner of persons: His enemies: the Pharisees, the Scribes, the soldiery, Caiphas, Judas; with sinners: Zaccheus, Magdalen, the Samaritan woman, the woman taken in adultery; with the afflicted: the widow of Naim, the poor, the lepers; with little children; with His friends: Lazarus, His disciples, His apostles, and especially St. John and St. Peter.

What marvelous charity He displays toward all! Be-

hold His humility, His patience toward His bitter, relentless enemies! How lenient He is toward sinners, how ready to forgive them. How tender and loving is His compassion for the afflicted, the sorrowing. He "embraces little children, and, laying His hands on them, blesses them" (Mark x. 16). He weeps over Jerusalem, the ungrateful city, and at the sepulcher of Lazarus, His friend; He teaches, fortifies, encourages His apostles; from St. Peter, to whom so much had been given and who had denied Him, He only requires three acts of love; He allows St. John to lean on His breast. "Behold how He loved him" (John xi. 36). His charity is beyond and above our poor conception: "He loved unto the end. *In finem delexit.*"

We will now consider the admonitions He gave by word of mouth to practise fraternal, mutual charity.

On the eve of His death, after the institution of the Sacrament of love, when the unhappy Judas had left the guest-chamber where the Passover had been eaten, Our Lord opened His Heart to His faithful disciples, and said to them (referring to His bodily presence amongst them): "Yet a little while I am with you. . . . A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples if you have love one for another" (John xiii. 35).

These glorious words may be said to constitute the complement of the institution of the Sacrament. Jesus gave Himself to His disciples in the Holy Eucharist, and now He would have His apostles give themselves to one another by charity, so that all might tend to and find its ultimate consummation in the unity of perfect charity.

Our Lord says: "A *new* commandment;" why is this? Because, as St. Augustine asserts, by this commandment He created the new man, man as he is in the order of grace,

not that of servile fear, the man after His own Heart; or as other interpreters declare, to indicate that this precept is of an excellence beyond anything that man can imagine; for Our Lord adds: "*As I have loved you,* that you also love one another." In fact, without the grace of Christ Jesus no mortal would have been capable of acts of love of charity so perfect; he could never even have conceived them.

Again, Our Lord says a *new* commandment to foretell to a certain extent the unheard-of acts of sublime heroism which fraternal charity would incite many saints to accomplish: witness St. Paul, St. Francis Xavier, St. Vincent of Paul, and others.

"A new commandment I give unto you. The commandment of My own Heart, which, if fulfilled, is all-sufficient, for 'love is the fulfilling of the law' (Rom. xiii. 10). It is that you love one another as I have loved you." What a rule is here laid down for Christians! How did Christ love us? With what tenderness, self-abnegation, generosity, devotedness! St. John sums up all in these sublime words: "In this we have known the charity of God, because He hath laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I. John, iii. 16).

Again, Our Lord says: "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another." There is the distinctive badge, there the unerring mark that we belong to Jesus Christ, that we are His disciples, His friends, those whom He will confess to be His true servants before His Father and before the holy angels: "If you have love one for another." He does not say: If you work miracles, if you undertake great enterprises, if you have a high reputation for sanctity, but: "If you have love one for another."

No wonder, then, that after hearing such teaching from

His lips the apostles should have insisted so frequently, so emphatically, in their epistles to the early Christians, on mutual charity. We must refrain from quoting the passages that abound in the writings of St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John, or this chapter would be interminable; the point which it is important to observe is the fidelity wherewith the disciples of the apostles followed their teaching, and corresponded to the grace which accompanied the new commandment given in the Cenacle. Holy Scripture thus eulogizes their charity: "The multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul" (Acts iv. 32). They were but one, adds a commentator, because they were all united in the charity of Christ, which is one.

St. Augustine brings before us the subject to which this work is specially devoted, by remarking that amongst Religious, whose name of monk (μόνος) signifies *one*, that is, men who though many are but one, this perfect union of heart and soul is most fully realized. We shall see how true is this observation whilst speaking of the practice of mutual charity in religious Congregations.

CHAPTER XV.

ON CHARITY OF MIND.

Although the heart is the seat and center of charity as St. Paul tells us: "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts" (Rom. v. 5), yet it may be said that besides charity of the heart there is a charity of the mind which ought to precede and lead up to it. What we have called charity of the mind is in reality the supernatural esteem which we entertain for our brethren. Now this inward disposition is undeniably a most useful, not to say necessary, preparation for the affective and effective charity which has its seat in the heart, and constitutes its essential foundation.

We are now going to speak of this supernatural esteem, and we shall add a few words concerning the disposition which inclines us always to take the most favorable view of our brethren's conduct.

1. On supernatural esteem for our brethren. This is an interior disposition and habit of mind which leads us to feel great respect, a sort of religious reverence for our brethren. It will be seen at a glance that this supernatural esteem is highly promotive of charity. But it behooves us to ascertain on what this disposition is based.

It could not have a better foundation than it has, for it rests upon faith, and looks at all things in the light of faith. What are the Religious with whom we live, what part do they take in the scheme of divine Providence?

What is the notice, what are the favors and privileges they have received from God? What is the dignity to which He has raised them, the rank He has assigned them in His spiritual kingdom? What, in short, is the work His love has wrought in them? To ask questions such as these is to court glorious replies; whatever, for the matter of that, the personal imperfections of individual souls may be. All we have to look at, to observe, is the work of God within them, the marvels His grace has effected, the sublime design that He has realized. Yes indeed, this design is worthy of our profound admiration.

The soul of every Religious, as we have said, is truly and preeminently a spouse of Jesus Christ, and if His spouse, she is a queen, invested with regal dignity to all eternity. She can say in the words of St. Agnes: "My Beloved has set His sign upon my countenance, that I recognize no lover but Himself. Milk and honey exhaled from His lips, as the blood from His stricken cheek impressed itself on mine. He has arrayed me in a vestment of gold; He has placed on my arms, on my neck, costly jewels of inestimable value. He whom the angels serve is my Spouse; He has put a ring on my finger and a diadem on my brow, the wreath of an eternal alliance." All this is true in a mystic sense of the Religious. The operations of divine grace are unseen by the bodily eye; the eye of the soul gazes on them with rapture. What are the crowns, the regal insignia, the riches of earthly monarchs compared with the crowns, the celestial treasures of the spouses of Christ? What are they for time, what are they for eternity? At the hour of death all the pomp of the great ones of the world will vanish like smoke, while the beauty, the glory of the spouses of Christ will appear in all their splendor. "They shall shine," as the prophet says, "as the brightness of the firmament" (Dan. xii. 3).

Here we behold the work of God, the marvels He effects

in the soul of the Religious in virtue of His gracious call, and His acceptance of the oblation and consecration of that soul on the day of her profession. When one thinks of all that the right hand of the Lord has done, one wonders that the inmates of the cloister, when they meet one another, do not bow down in spirit with feelings of profound reverence for one another, that they do not kiss one another's feet out of respect for all that God has done in them. Far be it from us to recommend unusual practices, acts which are, to say the least, peculiar. Yet if one who is deeply impressed with these exalted views were to regard his fellow-Religious only in the light of God's countenance, and, imbued with the sentiments thus engendered, should place himself in spirit at the feet of those to whom the Most High has shown such signal favor, should we be justified in terming his interior attitude as peculiar, in judging him to be the victim of a delusion? By no means; such a one would have known the gift of God, and his inward act would be perfectly in keeping with that which God in His mercy had wrought. And if all in a religious House felt the same way, what rich blessings would accrue to them; how perfectly they would accomplish their religious duties.

Everything would be the better for it; but it is evident that charity would be the chief gainer, as it would be for her a source of strength and vitality; nay more (and this of greatest value), she would acquire a holy and supernatural character.

But perhaps some one will say: Are these souls, whom God has honored and favored in so wondrous a manner, without faults? By no means; and it must be acknowledged that these faults are oftentimes most regrettable, most annoying, almost unbearable. Even these privileged souls, who are so marvelously honored and magnified, have their bad habits, their littlenesses, their oddities.

What conclusion are we to draw from this? A familiar comparison will serve as an explanation.

Look at the paintings hung on the walls of a picture gallery: each canvas has two sides; there is the one on which the artist's brush has been busy, producing master pieces such as Raphael's Transfiguration and Murillo's Assumption, and there is the other side, on which the dust lays thick. Which of the two is the one you look at? What would you think of the visitor who, after a cursory glance at the work of art before him, should persist in examining the reverse of the canvas, descanting upon the dust and cobwebs accumulated there, devoting to these his time and attention? Well, the Religious would do much the same if, heedless of the supernatural beauty God reveals to his spiritual vision in those with whom he dwells, he were to dwell upon the faults and imperfections of poor fallen human nature.

Let us carry on the comparison. The proprietor of the pictures ought to pay attention both to the painting itself and the reverse of the canvas, lest the state of the latter should be a disgrace to the work of the artist; he will notice the dust and remove it when necessary. That is what Superiors do. They observe, they study the good and the bad side of the souls entrusted to their charge. This is their duty. But the ordinary Religious only sees the side in which faith delights, and if accidentally he perceives the other, he does not take scandal at it; charity prompts him to put the best interpretation upon it. We will say a few words about this particular disposition.

2. Let us only judge our brethren favorably. The best way is not to judge them at all. Perhaps, however, it will not do to push this advice too far. Father Faber, who had great discernment, has said: "It is very difficult to acquire the habit of never judging others, and generally it is acquired very late in the spiritual life. But if it is next

to impossible to break one's self of the habit of judging, and if it is, besides, equally impossible for us to judge others without a breach of charity, let us adopt the alternative of always putting the best construction on their conduct."

Experience proves that by unremitting care and watchfulness we may succeed before long in only seeing the good side of our brethren's actions; for there always is a good side, and even if in some cases it is not very easy for us to discover it, there always remains the resource of supposing good intentions. Again we quote Fr. Faber. "Has not your past experience taught you," he says, "that as a rule our most charitable interpretations are always the truest? How often we have erred in our judgments, and this was almost invariably when they were most severe. Every day something of this kind occurs. Something appears to be clear as daylight, there is no possibility of viewing it otherwise; we have turned the matter over and worked ourselves up to a proper pitch of virtuous indignation. All at once the affair is cleared up in the most simple and natural manner, so that we are lost in astonishment that we never thought of this elucidation. How often have we been deceived when we put the most favorable construction on our neighbor's conduct? The times might be counted on less than the ten fingers of our hands."

Therefore let us always suppose the existence of good intentions, especially in a religious Community, where no one would do wrong deliberately. It is through inadvertency, through the frailty of human nature, or some inveterate habit which the individual at fault struggles to eradicate, and which despite his good will has got the better of him, that he has erred. Or one may say to one's self: No doubt he had permission to act thus, or the case was urgent and admitted of no other course; besides many things might be wrong for us which are positive acts

of virtue in another whose ideas of piety and punctuality differ from ours. The Superior may form his own judgment concerning what is decidedly an irregularity; but the inferior should always throw a veil of charity over these peccadilloes; and if it is necessary to publish them in the chapter, let him do so out of zeal for discipline and the general edification, and also in the hope of being useful to his brother in the work of his sanctification, which he pursues fervently, without the consciousness of having unwittingly offended his God.

Every one has heard of the hermit who, when at the point of death, said with holy confidence: "Now that I am about to appear before the tribunal of divine justice, I feel no apprehension. God Himself said: 'Judge not, that you may not be judged.' I can safely assert that throughout my whole life I never judged any one."

What happy security! What sweet peace would be ours if, not content with never putting an evil construction on the conduct of others, we only thought well of them! He whose habit it is always to think kindly of others is not far from becoming a saint. Words can not express the beauty of his soul. His life is like the serene eventide of a summer's day. It breathes the calm, the fragrance, the repose of evening; all noises are hushed, the landscape wears its fairest hues and the soul enjoys a happiness which is an earnest of heavenly bliss.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON CHARITY OF THE HEART.

CHARITY of the heart may be defined as supernatural sympathy. Jesus Christ is always and in all things our first, our great Exemplar; and in order that we may perceive more clearly the close connection existing between this tender and loving disposition of the Heart of Jesus and His state of a victim, St. Paul speaks of His commiseration for us as appertaining to His character of High-Priest. "We have not," he says, "a High-Priest who can not have compassion on our infirmities, but one tempted in all things such as we are;" that is, in His Passion and in His condition of a victim (Heb. iv. 15). And elsewhere he says: "Who loved me and delivered Himself for me" (Gal. ii. 20).

St. Paul also, who was so deeply imbued with the grace of Christ, of whom St. Chrysostom said that he had the heart of our adorable Lord, bore witness himself that he fulfilled the sublime duty of interior charity. Writing to the Corinthians he says: "Who is weak and I am not weak?" (II Cor. xi. 29). That is to say, who is afflicted and suffering with whom I do not suffer, with whom I am not afflicted? To the Galatians he writes that of them he is in labor, until Christ be formed in them (Gal. iv. 19); and he exhorts the Colossians to "put ye on therefore as the elect of God, holy, and beloved, the bowels of mercy" (Col. iii. 12). He bids the Romans to love one another, with the charity of brotherhood; to rejoice with them

that rejoice and weep with them that weep. Finally he makes use of this excellent comparison: In the body "if one member suffer anything all the members suffer with it, or if one member glory all the members rejoice with it," adding: "Now you are the body of Christ and members of member" (I Cor. xii. 27).

What powerful words are these! They are addressed to all the faithful in general; but are they not particularly, preeminently applicable to Religious? They have all things in common; everything is the same for each one: rules, constitutions, customs, food, clothes, exercises. And ought not they to be of one heart? It is charity of the heart that effects true union, spiritual unity.

Charity of heart rejects and repels all that is opposed to it: coldness, harshness, rancor. It delights in the dispositions that are proper to it: kindness, commiseration, solicitude on behalf of others; it applies itself to that which is the best proof of its sincerity: prayer for others. We will devote a short space to the consideration of these three points.

1. What is diametrically opposed to charity of the heart is voluntary coldness, harshness, etc. These are opposed to charity, but they are also opposed to all that is good; opposed to inward peace, to outward serenity; a hindrance to the action of divine grace and to the perfect efficacy of the sacraments. Never let us permit this icy blast, this poison, this pestilence to effect an entrance into our soul. Some one has offended us, hurt our feelings, been wanting in consideration and attention toward us. Well, what does that prove? If we are sincere we shall tell ourselves that it simply shows that we ought to make our noviceship over again to learn better that without humility, renunciation, death to self, we may indeed wear the religious habit, but we are far from having acquired the spirit of religion.

Again, some one has not behaved properly to us, and

we are inwardly agitated, perturbed, full of unkind thoughts toward the offender. What then? How long is this state of mind to last? One day, two days? The storm must be allayed; should we like to die with such sentiments in our heart? If all this must be ended, why should we willingly allow the poison to circulate in our system another hour, a quarter of an hour, a single instant?

There are however dislikes, natural antipathies which one does not know how to overcome. St. Francis calls these miseries the temptations of the saints; that is in itself an encouragement. We will quote his words: "Our Mother (St. Jane Chantal) will perhaps acquaint you with my fear lest the little foxes should creep into our vineyard (a new foundation) and destroy the vines; I refer to the aversions and dislikes which are the temptations of the saints. Stifle them at their birth. Keep your charity bound up (*bandée*) and let everything be suspect in your eyes which may prove contrary to unity, to mutual forbearance, to the reciprocal esteem which you ought to entertain for one another."

See how the saint recommends his spiritual daughters to be on their guard against indulging dislike and aversion. He bids them *bind up* their charity, that is to say, not let it waver, to concede nothing to nature, and he enjoins reciprocal esteem. We have always this resource which faith gives us.

2. The dispositions proper to interior charity are kindness, commiseration, etc.; to rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep. One who is truly charitable does not hold himself aloof from what interests the Community or any individual member of it. He is none the less simple, humble, peaceful because the joys and sorrows of his fellow-Religious affect him as much as if they were his own. St. Gregory says as much in one of his homilies, and he adds a remark which tallies

well with the leading idea of this work: "What holocaust is to be compared to a sacrifice offered by one who, animated by a generous will, immolates himself on the altar of his own heart?"

Wherefore if one of the members of the Community is sorely tried; if he is afflicted, tempted, suffering; if another seems to fall away from his pristine fervor, if a newly admitted postulant thinks he can not persevere, a novice makes no progress, a professed member is tempted to leave the Congregation; the trials, the needs of all these souls are felt more or less poignantly by the Religious in whose heart charity reigns supreme. In his sympathy, his anxiety for them he would fain help them. Render them the services they need and which he is at liberty to render; nay, if his desire were sanctioned by obedience, he would offer himself to God as a propitiatory victim, in virtue of his vocation, to bear their troubles and atone in his person for their coldness and half-heartedness.

We will give two examples of this spirit taken from the life of Blessed Margaret Mary.

"One evening," her biographer relates, "Sister Margaret Mary besought Our Lord to make known to her the means whereby she might satisfy her desire to love Him. He intimated to her that she could testify her love for Him in no better manner than by loving her neighbor for His sake; that she ought to make it her endeavor to bring about the salvation of sinners and of her Sisters in religion, although she was the most unworthy of them all, and forget her own interests to study theirs in everything she did. As she did not quite understand what was meant by this, Our Lord told her that what He wanted was the revival of charity in the hearts of men, since by the want of charity they had fallen away from Him, Himself perfect charity, and by their sins in that respect both seculars and Religious did not scruple to offend against that divine

virtue of charity which has its fount and source in the Heart of God Himself. 'It is these half-corrupt members, only fit to be cut off, which cause Me so much pain,' He said. 'They would long ago have received the chastisement they merit were it not for their devotion to My holy Mother. This appeases the wrath of My justice, which demands the sacrifice of a victim.' 'I was so deeply touched by that,' Sister Margaret added, 'that I would gladly have accepted every kind of torture, even the pains of purgatory, until the day of judgment, in order to satisfy His divine bounty.' "

The other trait is taken from the deposition of one of the nuns of the Visitation when the first official inquiry was made for the process of beatification. The witness affirmed that the Superior of the Visitation at Paray, Mère Greyffié, being subject to violent attacks of headache, Sister Margaret Mary besought God to let her bear these pains instead of her Superior, because, as she said, the Superior was necessary to the Community and she was not. In fact M. Greyffié had for three months no return of headache, while B. Margaret Mary had the pain in her place. But when the Mother Superior learned this, she said to her: "If suffering is good for us, as we know that it is, I wish to profit by it as well as you." Not long after the Mother Superior had a return of the pains, and Margaret Mary was free from them for the future.

Thus we see that the soul in whom the charity of Christ reigns supreme delights in self-sacrifice; that is the first but by no means the only consolation wherewith her divine Spouse rewards her. See these Brothers and Sisters, what progress they are making in the way of the commandments, of the evangelical counsels; their fervor, the grace vouchsafed to them seems to increase daily, their advance toward perfection is manifest to all. What cause for rejoicing to the soul who is inflamed with divine

charity. She soars aloft on the pinions of love toward the Heart of her Lord, to give Him thanks for enabling them to serve Him so well; she implores Him to add grace to grace, in order that His spouses may be more and more worthy of Him.

Let us beware of asserting that this is a matter merely of character or temperament. Certainly character and temperament may have a good deal to do with the emotion outwardly displayed in some touching, thrilling juncture; but St. Paul distinctly attributes these dispositions to the operation of the power of grace. Listen to his description of the charity which is the work of the Holy Ghost. "Charity is kind; it rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth;" that is, it finds its greatest consolation in seeing others make progress in the way of justice. "Charity," he continues, "believeth all things, hopeth all things;" forms the best hopes, that is, for the future of its neighbor, and never despairs of his salvation, but believes gladly all the good that is said of him. "Charity seeketh not her own," is devoid of all jealousy, and has none but the kindest feelings for every one (I. Cor. xiii. 5).

So speaks the great Apostle; but we must not pass over without mention the first quality he ascribes to charity: "Charity is patient," *caritas patiens est.* Why should it be patient, and why should he dwell particularly on this characteristic in connection with Community life? Can it be that, amongst souls who are consecrated to God, charity requires the support and assistance of patience? Yes, so it is; and patience, that beauteous and noble virtue, united to charity, has, as St. James says, "a perfect work." Patience is necessary everywhere, even among saints. But the patience of the saints, being that which charity inspires, is always gentle, simple, modest, and humble. It is the victim that is led to the slaughter without opening his mouth, conscious that

self-immolation is the condition which best befits him.

Such is interior charity. If as yet we are devoid of it, let us not excuse ourselves on the plea of character and temperament; rather let us humble ourselves, and with fervent petitions implore grace to acquire the possession of so grand, so precious, so necessary a virtue.

3. The good work which testifies to and proves the sincerity of our charity is prayer for our brethren. Do we pray for all the members of our Community? Do we pray for them frequently, fervently? There are prayers recited in Community for the novices, the sick, the Superiors; these ought to be joined in with great attention and devotion, not as a matter of habit and routine; but it is not of them that we speak: it is of the loving, fond remembrance in your own prayers of the Community in general and the individual members in particular. You will pray for them when you visit the Blessed Sacrament, or the Blessed Virgin, or while making your thanksgiving after communion; and this remembrance of them, this intercession for them will be one of holy fervor and trustful confidence; one which will be known to no one except to your Father who seeth in secret, by whom alone you will be rewarded. How pleasing to the Heart of our divine Lord are these petitions, borne aloft on the wings of humility and charity! They will, moreover, be free from all temptation to vainglory. An external act, a kind speech, a service offered and rendered, might be exposed to that evil (not that we should omit it on that account, God forbid!); but with prayer it is different. It is disinterested, it is hidden; into this act of charity no human element can enter. Let us therefore pray earnestly for those who are the companions of our exile here below, and with whom we are destined to form a crown of rejoicing for Jesus and Mary in heaven.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON CHARITY IN SPEECH AND IN BEHAVIOR. WHAT OUGHT TO BE AVOIDED.

On this subject we have to point out, first what ought to be avoided; secondly, what ought to be done. What ought to be avoided in word is detraction (calumny still more, but surely this is unknown among the privileged children of God, the spouses of Jesus Christ), bitterness, harshness, ill-temper, abruptness; and in demeanor the air, the bearing, the gestures, the distant behavior which sometimes raise insurmountable barriers between souls. The conduct that ought to be observed is that which St. Paul enjoins in his epistle to the Romans (Rom. xv. 2): "Let every one of you please his neighbor unto good to edification." This text ought to be the heading of every treatise on Christian courtesy.

1. What ought to be avoided.

First and foremost, slander must be avoided. What a terrible curse this is for a Community! Evil speaking is of two kinds: there is that which proceeds from malice, which is prompted by jealousy or rancor (but surely it is unnecessary to speak of this, it can not exist in a religious House), and there is evil speaking which is the result of a foolish habit, a fault of character, or, once in a way, is the expression of wounded feelings.

It is easy to perceive that these two classes of evil speaking are not of equal gravity. We will discuss each separately.

As to the first, it would be impossible to quote all the maledictions, the anathemas hurled against the odious sin of slander by the Holy Ghost in the pages of Holy Scripture, and by the saints of all ages, notably those who have lived in Community.

Let us listen to the words of Holy Writ:

"The whisperer and the double-tongued is accursed; for he hath troubled many that were at peace.

"The tongue of a third person hath disquieted many, and scattered them from nation to nation.

"It hath destroyed the strong cities of the rich, and hath overthrown the houses of great men.

"It hath cut in pieces the forces of peoples, and undone strong nations.

"The tongue of a third person hath cast out valiant women, and deprived them of their labors.

"He that hearkeneth to it shall never have rest, neither shall he have a friend in whom he may repose.

"The stroke of a whip maketh a blue mark; but the stroke of the tongue will break the bones.

"Many have fallen by the edge of the sword; but not so many as have perished by their own tongue.

"Blessed is he that is defended from a wicked tongue, that hath not passed into the wrath thereof, and that hath not drawn the yoke thereof, and hath not been bound in its bonds.

"For its yoke is a yoke of iron; and its bonds are bonds of brass.

"The death thereof is a most evil death and hell is preferable to it.

"Its continuance shall not be for a long time, but it shall possess the ways of the unjust; and the just shall not be burnt with its flame.

"They that forsake God shall fall into it, and it shall burn in them and shall not be quenched, and it shall be

sent upon them as a lion, and as a leopard it shall tear them.

"Hedge in thy ears with thorns, hear not a wicked tongue, and make doors and bars to thy mouth.

"Melt down thy gold and silver, and make a balance for thy words, and a just bridle for thy mouth" (Ecclus. xxviii. 15–29).

We will now listen to St. Bernard's exposition of these words of the Psalmist: "The sons of men, whose teeth are weapons and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword" (Ps. lvi. 5). This, he says, is perfectly true, for the tongue of the backbiter is a double-edged, nay, a triple-edged sword. Is not his tongue a spear? Yes, verily, and a sharp one, too; with a single thrust it will transfix three persons. Is it not a viper? Yes, a viper of the most venomous description; with her poisoned fang she strikes death into three souls at once. The prophet says again: "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent: the venom of asps is under their lips" (Ps. cxxxix. 4). He compares the tongue of the slanderer to that of the serpent. The tongue of the serpent gives a fatal wound; a better comparison could not be chosen to make known the terrible evil wrought by the tongue of the slanderer.

We need say no more. Undoubtedly this evil is very rare in religious Communities. Moreover, we believe and hope that, for the well being and peace of the simple, straightforward souls who inhabit these Houses, Our Lord will not permit the corrupt members (as He Himself calls them in speaking to B. Margaret Mary) who are tainted with this moral leprosy to wear the religious habit until death removes them, but will have them cast out, as their just punishment, as belonging to those of whom St. Bernard says that the devil makes use of their tongue to scatter deadly poison at his will.

The second kind of evil speaking, of a less serious nature

than that which we have been considering, is unhappily by no means unknown, even in well-regulated Communities. There is always one member who does not keep pace with the rest, who offends first against one virtue, then against another, and the rules of charity are perhaps those which he least respects. There is, we will suppose, a brother, a sister, whom we dislike. What is the reason of this? It is not always easy to say, still less to avow. We tell ourselves, with more or less self-deception, that his manners, his way of talking are what we dislike. But, in reality, the reason why we do not like him is because we ourselves are wanting in humility, in patience. Who can say whether our feelings toward him are not prompted by a secret jealousy which pride will not allow us to confess? However that may be, if any one about us makes some depreciating remark concerning that individual, we can not help feeling a spontaneous, involuntary sense of pleasure; and if the unbecoming, ill-advised observation does not come from any other lips, we ourselves, without thinking, throw the blame, more or less justly, on the object of our aversion.

We must never justify this fault to ourselves; it must be run to earth, conquered completely, and at any cost. If it has become a habit, all the Community, we venture to say, must give a helping hand to eradicate it; the Superiors by their advice, reproofs, incessant penances; the others by pitilessly exposing it in the chapter of faults, and by all other means which charity may suggest.

Evil speaking is confessedly a great and deplorable evil; but to our mind there is something yet worse. It is what is done by the indiscreet Religious who repeats the slander. To say: "Such a one said this or that of you," is worse than dealing a blow with a poisoned weapon; and if the repeater goes on to say: "For goodness' sake, do not say that you have heard it or who told you," he turns the

blade in the wound he has made, and no one can tell how long that wound may bleed; it may not heal for a whole lifetime. The evil thus done is incalculable; it may upset a whole Community. Holy Scripture tells us that the soul of the Lord detesteth him that soweth discord among brethren; and St. Gregory (Pope), speaking of the blessedness of peace-makers, who shall be called the children of God, concludes from this that those who sow dissension in the hearts of their brethren are to be called the children of Satan.

Let us, in order to remove the unpleasant impression our consideration of this subject has produced, recall the eulogium St. Augustine pronounces on his mother, St. Monica.

"My mother," he says, "was of so mild and pacific a nature, that whatever persons who had quarrelled said against each other to her (as often happens when, in the heat of anger, the offended party speaks to a friend of his absent enemy), she only repeated to one or other of the persons who were at variance what was calculated to bring about a reconciliation as speedily as possible."

Slanderous words are not the only ones to be avoided. We must be on our guard against everything that might wound that delicate virtue which is the most pleasing expression of mutual charity: cordiality of word and manner. St. Francis of Sales calls this the essence of true friendship, particularly becoming to Religious, because their affection for one another is not an ordinary friendship, but a *cordial* one, that is to say, it comes from the heart.

We would therefore say to the Religious who is desirous not to be wanting in cordiality: When you are going to recreation, ask yourself what are your mental and physical conditions. Your conversation will take its color from them. If you feel tired, or are in pain, or are worried by some secret trouble; or if in the course of the morning you

have been ruffled or hurt by some act which you thought inconsiderate or rude; if you have been scandalized by the behavior of your neighbor, take care, it is much to be feared that you will not make yourself pleasant. Very likely you will talk in a curt, abrupt, cold way, your manner will be less agreeable than usual, there will be something forced, harsh about it. This must not be amongst brethren.

If you address the brother whose behavior has taxed your humility too severely, do not speak to him without having inwardly invoked in your aid the gentleness and meekness of the Heart of Jesus and of His holy Mother. Otherwise what you say will be said with a bad grace, and unless your fellow-Religious is more amiable than you are, the conversation will either take an unpleasant turn or be remarkably tame.

If you are in a good humor, be on your guard all the same, whatever the cause of your good humor may be; you have been successful in something, some one has spoken kindly to you, or you may have received some sensible favor from heaven. A little self-restraint is needed under these circumstances, otherwise you may be led to talk in a thoughtless, inconsiderate, exaggerated manner.

If you are longing to say a sharp or amusing thing, which is perhaps more witty than amiable, keep it to yourself. The reputation of being a clever fellow is not a distinction to be coveted in a Community of men, while the reputation for sharp sayings is, among a Congregation of women, tantamount to a charge of worldliness.

Never argue or dispute with any one. "Contend not in words," St. Paul says to Timothy, "for it is to no profit but to the subverting of the hearers" (II. Tim. ii. 14). St. John Climacus asserts that obstinacy, even in the defence of the truth, is of the devil. Undoubtedly there

are many subjects which may be discussed, and on which it is quite allowable to have one's own opinion, to follow one's own tastes and inclinations; but how should we be the better or our brethren the gainers if they thought and judged as we did? We should profit much more by giving up our own judgment. Let us not forget that very rarely is God's glory promoted by our own private opinion being proved right.

We have now seen what must in general be avoided in order not to offend against charity in our speech. We do not intend to enter into any details now concerning the behavior which ill accords with charity; what we have to say in the next chapter on the Rules laid down by charity in this respect, will teach very plainly what ought to be avoided, by showing what ought to be observed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON CHARITY IN SPEECH AND IN BEHAVIOR. WHAT OUGHT TO BE OBSERVED.

Holy Scripture tells that "a sweet word multiplieth friends" (Ecclus. vi. 5). Christian sweetness has an inexpressible charm; we say *Christian* sweetness, because it ought to be supernatural, a reflection of the Heart of Jesus.

It is, perhaps, more difficult to speak kindly than to act kindly, since more tact is required to say the right thing at the right time than to do what is opportune. As a rule, it seems as if kindly and charitable words ought to come from a Superior rather than from equals and inferiors. What matter! Let us always keep strict guard over our tongue, let us always be affable and complaisant. There is a way of replying to a question, of assenting to a proposal, of granting a request, of merely saying yes or no, which is redolent of the charity and sweetness of the Heart of Jesus. The cordial affection, says St. Francis of Sales, which befits Religious, ought to be attended by two virtues: affability and agreeable conversation. The former makes us compliant and obliging in all dealings of a graver nature, in more serious intercourse with others; the latter renders us courteous and pleasant at recreation and in all casual intercourse with our neighbor. All virtues, he goes on to say, have, as you know, two faults which are exactly opposed to them. Thus affability is

apt to run either to the extreme of gravity and seriousness on the one hand, or on the other to weak compliance and speeches of an almost flattering nature. Agreeable conversation requires one to contribute one's share to the sober joy and pleasant converse which are a relief, a welcome relaxation for one's neighbor.

A recreation passed well and pleasantly is a real benefit for a Community, and kindly words are a wonderful help to bring about this result. Wherefore let us hold in abhorrence every word that is contrary to this divine virtue.

If, unfortunately, something should happen to be said in depreciation of one who is absent, let us find a means of repairing the wrong by excusing him. This must be done gently and discreetly if it is to be effectual; however, we must endeavor to act so, and ask wisdom from Our Lord. The means others employ is adroitly to turn the conversation, if it is prolonged and charity suffers. Both of these means are particularly pleasing to the Heart of our divine Master. They are also grateful to the Community which does not fail to detect true charity by its perfume. A Religious who is known as not tolerating an unkind word to be said in his presence, gives more edification than the most mortified of his brethren and the most punctual in keeping the Rule. And, as the Holy Spirit tells us: "He is beloved of God and men" (Ecclus. xlv. 1).

But there are peculiar circumstances to be thought of. Suppose one who has been hurt, aggrieved, and who suffers in consequence, comes to pour out his grievances in your sympathizing ear. As a rule, it is not advisable for Religious to tell their troubles to one another, in fact we think it is wiser to forbid this; the results are far more often prejudicial than beneficial. Yet the office one holds or a special permission may make it incumbent upon us to listen to these unwelcome confidences.

But, it may be said, surely this individual who is troubled and cast down will wound the charity we love so well, he will complain, and not always justly.

One ought, it seems, to listen first of all with patience and sympathy to the recital of his wrongs; whether real or imaginary, they cause him suffering all the same. We must not forget that what we have to do is to do him good. Let him therefore lay bare his wounds. They will be half healed already, if this imperfect brother is once fully convinced that your dominant feeling for him is one of kind compassion. You will then complete the cure, if, like the Samaritan in the Gospel, you pour on oil and wine; the oil of gentle, soothing, mollifying words, the wine of invigorating, encouraging advice; and, if necessary, by placing the matter in its true light, showing that the offence has been exaggerated through imputing bad motives, and that an unbiased judgment would pronounce the complainant to be himself the delinquent.

To bring about this result certainly would take time, but it is quite feasible. However, one would defeat one's own ends were one not to begin by showing the discouraged individual every proof of deep and sincere sympathy.

While on the subject of good words, there is one point which it seems we ought not to omit. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. xii. 34). If our love for our brethren is not confined to those with whom we live, but includes those who are departed, who formerly were united with us in our prayers, our work, our sufferings, to whom we were united by the ties of a mutual close and tender affection, we should delight in recalling them to mind during our recreations, and their memory would serve to hallow that sociable hour. We should speak of their virtues, quote some of their sayings, their maxims, recall some incident of their life. St. Francis of Sales complained of the way the dead were forgotten.

He said: "The proof of this is that we talk of them so seldom." A Community ought not to deserve this reproach. We should be inclined to regard as a mark of fervor, certainly as testifying to the prevalence of an admirable spirit, if Religious in their conversation often spoke of the departed. This charitable conduct can not fail to be profitable to the living, and it supposes that prayers are frequently sent up to God on behalf of the suffering souls.

Let us now turn to charity in behavior.

The Religious, we presume, is brought into contact with the aged and infirm, with those who are employed in the same work as themselves, with those whose character, temperament, and tastes differ widely from his own. Under these circumstances St. Paul's exhortation must be remembered: "Let every one of you please his neighbor unto good to edification;" and the Apostle adds: "For Christ did not please Himself" (Rom. xv. 2). Here our great Exemplar is set before us. The practice of perfect charity gives occasion for continual self-sacrifice. But this self-sacrifice well becomes one who, by his profession, has been consecrated as a victim, and it is delightful to think that here, as everywhere, Christ is our pattern. *Unusquisque vestrum proximo suo placeat in bonum, ad edificationem: etenim Christus non sibi placuit.*

There are always services to be rendered to the aged and infirm, to the sick and suffering, and there is much call for patience. If so, let us do what is required with so cheerful a countenance, with such a quiet, kind, unaffected manner, that the old and the sick may think that it is a pleasure to us to serve them. This is very important. And let us remember, when old age comes upon us, or if we are sick or infirm, to be careful to be extremely gentle, patient, and grateful toward those who wait on us, and think more of the trouble they take on our behalf than

of our own suffering and discomfort. Thus we too, in our turn, shall practise charity.

It is a pleasing sight to see two persons, one of whom is the served and the other the server, who both endeavor to fulfil the Apostle's injunction: "Let every one of you please his neighbor."

In regard to those of our brethren with whom we are associated in our work, charity requires that we should do our utmost to avoid friction. Perfect agreement is necessary if our work is to be productive of good to the Community, and equally necessary for the peace and personal profit of the workers themselves. They will do well to take as their inviolable rule these words of the Apostle: "That you be of one mind, having the same charity, being of one accord, agreeing in sentiment. Let nothing be done through contention, neither by vainglory; but in humility let each esteem others better than themselves. Each one not considering the things that are his own, but those that are other men's" (Phil. ii. 2–4). And if through indolence of character or inadvertence your brother now and again leaves some portion of his task unfinished or badly performed, so that the greater part of the work falls to your share, do not show that you have remarked this. It may be that for the sake of order and discipline this state of things is not allowed to continue, and the brother receives the reprimand he deserves; but until the Superior interferes for the general edification, let nothing disturb the peace and simplicity of your mind. Far from feeling annoyed, you should rather be grateful to him for having afforded you so excellent an occasion for self-sacrifice, and consequently of merit. St. John Chrysostom has two admirable comparisons pertinent to this subject: "Does the huntsman," he asks, "if he sees a splendid stag in his path, complain that those who have gone that way before him neglected to kill it? Or does the traveler who sees a

gold coin lying by the roadside refrain from stooping to pick it up, saying to himself: Why have not those who have covered the ground before me taken possession of it?"

The piece of gold represents the work imperfectly performed which the brother who is animated by true charity hastens to make his own; and observe that the traveler, fearing lest his treasure should be taken from him, says not a word about it to any one.

Charity also imparts a blessing, an unction, a celestial aid to all we do when we have dealings of business, or have to work in some ministerial capacity with members of the Community whose character, whose way of looking at things, whose tastes are diametrically opposed to our own.

Mark first of all that these differences ought not to surprise us. They enter into the designs of Providence for many reasons that might be mentioned, and for this particular one, to afford us an occasion of practising virtues which otherwise we should only know by name. These diversities exist even in great saints; witness St. Augustine and St. Jerome. The important point is that on both sides the greatest gentleness and kindness should be exercised, for after all, in spite of all differences of character and ways of looking at things, it is essentially necessary to be of one heart and one mind: *Cor unum et anima una.* We must love one another as Christ loved us.

One point must not be omitted, as it is of no slight importance. Let us beware of imagining ourselves to be the one who must exercise patience, and that our brother ought only to thank heaven that he has us to deal with. Nothing would be more odd, not to say ridiculous, than to pose as a martyr, a victim offered up at the pleasure of the brother whose faults are so many sacrificial swords whereby we are immolated. God forbid that we should indulge such pitiful delusions! The true victim is the

one who humbly and modestly lays self on the altar to be consumed by the flame of sincere charity.

We will therefore make it our unwearying endeavor at all times and on all occasions to cause this humble, lowly, sincere charity to be apparent in our speech, our behavior, the tones of our voice, the expression of our countenance, in short, in our whole outward man. To attach no value to these tangible signs of paternal affection would show that we had failed to understand the grace of Community life. Christian politeness is said to be charity in its perfection. And where should perfect charity be met with if not among Religious? Let them therefore aim at acquiring it for the sake of Our Lord, who (it sounds familiar, but we say it with all respect) was the most perfect gentleman that ever existed. Is it not said of Him that "He hath done all things well?" (Mark vii. 37). Are we wrong in thinking that every Religious ought under all circumstances to give the impression of being well bred? A good education can be nothing but a benefit, especially in regard to sanctity. Now the Religious who carefully keeps the rules of charity is holy in God's sight, and it may be said of him as of his divine Master: *Benè omnia fecit.* He hath done all things well.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE FAMILY SPIRIT IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES.

THE family spirit is a charitable attitude of mind, which, if shared by all the members of a Community, inspires them with a cordial love for their common life, their mutual relations, the work proper to the Institute, the spirit, the object, the spiritual prosperity of the Order. It is a spirit of peace, of concord, of simplicity, of self-denial, and self-devotion.

There is much to be said in praise of this spirit, which, if it prevails in a religious House, gives one some idea of the union existing amongst the angels, of the perfect harmony that reigns in their celestial hierarchy.

The Religious who is animated by it looks upon his Community, his monastery, as his family and his home; the spot where of all others he prefers to live and die, which he would only exchange for his heavenly country. He no longer belongs to any one race or nation, his Congregation is to him the nation, the country of his choice.

All his affections, his hopes, his energies are centered on this Congregation wherein he finds all that his soul can desire to assure her sanctification here, her eternal bliss hereafter. Doubtless he feels affection, esteem, reverence for all the Orders and Congregations instituted in the Church of God, and which by the sanctity of their life and the perfection of their works are the consolation, the joy, the support of our holy Mother Church; yet the best, the tenderest love of his inmost heart is given to his own beloved

Order. St. Francis of Sales says: "The Religious will frankly acknowledge that other Congregations are more excellent than his own, but no other is so good and suitable for him, since Our Lord has ordained that it should be his earthly home, the bark of his salvation."

Thus the delight of the Religious who is possessed by the spirit whereof we speak is to remain always united to the rest of his Community by the exact, punctual observance of the holy Rule, of the minutest injunctions, the most trifling customs. He seeks to acquaint himself with the letter, the wording of the laws by which his Order is governed, to imbibe their spirit, to live by their life. How much he likes the work proper to his Order, how he takes to everything which is the special vocation of its members! He seems to have no joys or sorrows apart from those of this, his spiritual Mother. He is glad, not from pride or from self-love as being a member of the body corporate (for this would be an inversion of the supernatural spirit and displeasing to the Heart of Jesus), but from a filial, heartfelt, grateful affection, he is glad, I say, to see his Order held in esteem by the ecclesiastical authorities, commended by the Holy See, respected by men of worth; he is pleased to hear that promising postulants have applied for admission, hoping as he does that by their excellence as Religious (not by their talents or their wealth, of that he takes small account) they will help to keep up the discipline, the spirit of regularity, and thus increase the merits of the Community.

The Religious is, moreover, ready to make any sacrifices for the good of his spiritual family. Is he required to change houses, to give up his work, to accept a responsible post? He consents to everything humbly, unostentatiously, but courageously and generously. The welfare of the Congregation demands it; the Congregation is ordained of God, it accomplishes His holy will; its prosper-

ity promotes the honor and glory of God; that is enough for this magnanimous soul. Is he not called to be a victim in the sight of the God of love and of his brethren?

The spirit of the family is also a spirit of order. The Religious who is animated by it is anxious that nothing should disturb the perfect order which ought to prevail in a house consecrated to God. He takes a lively interest in everything, he does his utmost, within the limits of humility and obedience, to uphold this perfect order everywhere. Is it necessary to be more explicit? That implement is not in its place, the shutters of that window are not bolted; a candlestick has been left where it ought not to be, a lamp is found still burning in the morning, a little piece of wood has fallen from the fagots that were carried in. . . . Who will say such trifles are not worth noticing? Many Religious are glad to have these trifles mentioned. Those who have the true spirit of the family, who love order and tidiness, like to put everything back into its place. They can not tolerate carelessness, not from irritability of any kind, or from restlessness and officiousness, but as members of an Order to the welfare of which they seek to contribute in as far as they can.

Finally, this family spirit is discreet. When we speak of discretion we mean the virtue which makes us reticent and prudent in keeping the secrets of the Community and its members. St. Jane Chantal used to impress the necessity of this virtue most emphatically on her daughters.

Every Community has, it is true, matters which concern itself alone: projects, hopes, fears, difficulties, trials both external and internal. Perhaps, by the permission of God, in His inscrutable designs, the Community may be passing through a season of trial and affliction for which no one can account; it is perhaps caused by the ill-will or imprudence of some of its members, or the incapacity or tactlessness of some one in authority; all this is not

impossible. The most successful foundations have to pass through these trials; the important point is not to let them get noised abroad. In all communications with outsiders, whether personal or epistolary intercourse, the most inviolable secrecy must be observed. To our ecclesiastical Superiors alone, who stand toward us in the place of God, who are appointed by the Church to guide, encourage, support us, to them alone may we unburden our hearts. It is our duty to consult them, their right to counsel us. It is also their duty to acquaint themselves with everything that affects the wise government of a Congregation. But with the exception of these, our lawful confidants in any difficulties, the affairs of the Community must be kept a profound secret. Any indiscretion in this respect might occasion great annoyances, not to say grave evils.

This same discretion ought to prevent Religious who hold no office from endeavoring to discover what course of conduct their Superiors and their counselors are pursuing or intend to pursue for the good order and government of the Community. This is a very important point, on which the founders of the different Orders invariably insist. The family spirit, which as we have said is a spirit of peace, of simplicity, of concord, is very influential in this respect.

But discretion is not only needful in regard to matters that concern the Community. Every member has secrets concerning himself, sometimes of a delicate nature. One brother is troubled by scruples, by doubts and difficulties; another has some painful infirmity, a third has disreputable family connections, a Sister has been received without a dowry. . . . All these and similar matters must remain the secret of those who are acquainted with them, a secret to be kept most jealously from the knowledge of all outsiders, even intimate friends. They are family affairs,

and must remain the exclusive property of the family, whose brotherly spirit of forbearance and kindness ignores the barrier of mine and thine, and merges all individual interests in the union of charity.

The same discreet reticence, the same charitable reserve must be observed if one of the Community is at fault, if he is in disgrace with his Superiors. The Superiors alone have to deal with such cases. The others must hold their peace, betake themselves to prayer, and hope for the best.

Would that this loving spirit prevailed in all religious Houses. What is a Community without this bond of tender relationship, imparting divine, celestial consolation to the simple, chaste, humble souls in whom it holds sway?

We are of opinion that it is the family spirit in religious Houses which is spoken of in terms of such high eulogium in a homily often attributed to St. Bernard, but more correctly to a writer of his day. "How glorious, how delightful it is to see men following the same manner of life, living under the same roof! One bewails his sins with tears; another chants sacred canticles; one teaches, another serves; one is engaged in prayer, the other is occupied with reading. One will forgive an offence, another will punish it with severity. Some are inflamed with the fire of charity; the humility of others is made apparent most strikingly when success attends their efforts; in others it shines most brightly in seasons of trial. You will see some devoted to an active life, whereas others enjoy the sweet repose of contemplation. But all are one, and you who witness the perfect unity that prevails amongst them will exclaim: 'This is no other than the house of God and the gate of heaven.'"

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE PRINCIPAL PIOUS EXERCISES IN USE IN RELIGION.

This chapter will be devoted to the principal religious exercises of monastic life. It seems, indeed, that the space of a single chapter would be insufficient for the consideration of such a subject. Assuredly of all the observances prescribed by the Rule, these are the most worthy of our reverence, the most worthy of the attention and affection of the monk or nun, either because their object is to pay to God the homage due to Him, or because it is principally in the performance of these pious exercises that the Religious both imbibe and at the same time puts into practice the victim's spirit of self-surrender, the spirit essentially their own. We shall not say much on this subject, but what we say will be enough for the fervent and thoughtful Religious.

The morning offering, although not precisely enjoined by the Rule, is one of the most important counsels given in the Directorium. And rightly so. The first-fruits are the Lord's, and according to the well-known saying of St. John Climacus, the whole day belongs to him to whom the beginning is given, God, or the demon of self-indulgence, of lawlessness.

Our awakening in the morning is like entering anew upon life. The Religious will do well to unite himself to the intentions of the divine Victim, who on coming into the world said: "Behold I come to do Thy will, O God"

(Heb. x. 9), or to the same gracious Lord in the mystery of His Resurrection, when He set the seal of immortality on His character of victim. Let the devout soul, the spouse of Jesus, then renew her oblation as a sacrificial victim, and apply herself, as St. Paul says, "to walk in newness of life" (Rom. vi. 4), to advance in the way of perfection.

"Our awakening," says St. Bonaventure, "may be compared to a daily resurrection; the faithful ought to give thanks to God for it every morning, by offering its first-fruits to Him, in union with Jesus Christ."

This attitude of self-sacrifice in union with Our Lord was familiar to the worthy hermits of the desert who are in everything our models. The Abbot Theonas, in a conference recorded by Cassian, said that it was the devil's great aim to distract our minds when we woke in the morning, to prevent us from making our daily oblation to God; adding that if we desire to offer and consecrate to the Lord acceptable first-fruits, we ought to make custody of the senses one of our chief cares in the early hours, regarding them as pure and spotless holocausts to be dedicated to the divine Majesty.

Thus at our uprising let the spirit of self-surrender sanctify every act and thought. And if this demands some sacrifice on our part, let us make it generously and unhesitatingly. St. Vincent of Paul said that many lost their vocation through neglecting to sanctify their uprising, adding this striking sentence: "The grace of the vocation depends on prayer, and prayer depends on the grace given when we rise in the morning."

The morning offering of the day naturally disposes the Religious to make his morning meditation well; this is a subject which can not be treated in a few words. The masters of the spiritual life have written about it at length, and from their works may be learned how to enjoy this

blessed solace of our life of exile. Mental prayer is like a mystic table spread with the aliments that sustain the spirit of sacrifice; but it is also an altar whereon the soul immolates herself, offering to the divine Majesty all the acts appertaining to the most complete self-sacrifice: adoration, thanksgiving, oblation, contrition, the desire of expiation, abandonment to the guidance of Providence, confidence in His love and in His justice. And in rising from her meditation, the soul resolves never to leave the altar of burnt-offering, on which she will be perpetually consumed in the flame of perfect charity.

Mental prayer awakens in her these generous dispositions; holy Mass consecrates them. How can we venture to speak of holy Mass, that sacred and solemn moment for one who is the spouse of Christ and the victim of His Sacred Heart! This is indeed the supreme act of worship, in which Our Lord offers to His Father the most perfect homage, and gives to man the most wondrous proof of love. He offers the sacrifice of Himself and makes the soul who is His spouse one with Him in that sacrifice, that by this ineffable union they may form one only victim in the sight of the infinitely adorable and amiable Majesty of God the Father. Let the Religious take no other view than this of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The methods of hearing it differ, but the dominant idea is always the same; to join by the closest union possible in the intentions of Christ our Victim, for the honor and glory of His Father and the salvation of souls.

For this alone, for the attainment of this end, the soul longs for holy communion. To communicate is to receive. to receive as one's own the body and blood of Jesus Christ in His state of a victim; it is to receive His spirit also, the spirit of self-sacrifice. In this the union is consummated. But we will say no more, only leave the devout

Religious to know and acknowledge, with holy rapture, that if the Holy Eucharist is the mystic food of all Christians, the members of Christ, it is preeminently, in a special and sublime manner, the sacrament of those who are His spouses and fellow-victims.

In the course of the day many prayers are recited in community, before and after the exercises, the meals, readings, etc.; and every Religious has his private devotions also, authorized by his Superior. Let us always pray by Christ, with Christ, in Christ, who is at once our High-Priest and our Victim. Our union with Him ought to be of so intimate a nature, our dependence on His Spirit so complete, His dominion over our souls so absolute, as to enable us to say: It is no longer I that pray, but Christ who prays within me, His Spirit animates me, His grace vivifies my every act of worship.

The divine office is the Religious' principal form of prayer. We have already spoken on this pleasing subject, which St. Augustine called his delight. In the recital of the divine office the Religious does, in fact, find his chief solace. How often troubles, sadness, temptations vanish whilst he is engaged in this celestial occupation; the soul rejoices to feel herself in union with the whole Church below, with the whole Church above! This is the sacrifice of praise which is so pleasing unto God, which ascends to His throne on High and renders those who take part in it with pure hearts sharers in the bliss of the redeemed.

In the sixth chapter of the first part we showed how the Religious is a victim whilst occupied in this sacred work, the work justly called by the saints the work of God, *opus Dei*. We shall now see in what way he may be said to be a victim for the whole world. In the chapter just mentioned we took Cardinal de Bérulle for our teacher; we shall now do the same.

Writing to the Carmelites on their first introduction into France, he says: "You fulfil this office not for yourselves alone, but for every creature who is unworthy or unable to praise his God. Some are dumb, destitute alike of voice and of soul, and they borrow your intelligence, your tongue to offer to their Creator an ascription of praise; others are as it were in their childhood, under age, and they avail themselves of your primogeniture and seniority in the order of grace for the purpose by your instrumentality of fulfilling their bounden duty and paying to their sovereign Lord the homage they owe to Him; others by their own fault have deprived themselves of the graces that might have been theirs, and being accursed of God are unworthy to sing His praises. Thus a twofold blessing rests on you; you are doubly privileged, inasmuch as you praise God on behalf of others and on your own. With this intention and this idea betake yourself to the choir, as if empowered by all created beings to laud and magnify their common Lord, as if commissioned to perform their duty and do their part for them.

"You praise God in the name of heaven and of earth, of creatures animate and inanimate, of Christians and unbelievers, of Catholics and heretics, of the elect and the reprobate, of hell itself, though it would fain silence your voice. You stand between heaven and hell; hell is beneath your feet, and would to God that you took as much pains to praise God as the devils do to curse Him! Would to God that you had as vivid a conviction of His mercy as hell has of His justice! Heaven is opened above you; would to God that you were informed by a faith as lively and steadfast as the vision of His grandeur enjoyed by its denizens is clear and blissful! Would to God that your elevation of soul, your pious transports equalled in degree the repose, the glory, the happiness of the redeemed in the possession of their Lord!

"But there is another incentive to admiration and gratitude in the office you fill.

"The eternal Father willed that His Son should become incarnate, and the Son willed to assume our nature in order to be able to praise and serve His heavenly Father in a more exalted, more divine manner than was possible for men or angels, in the order of grace or of glory; for previous to the mystery of the Incarnation there were both men and angels who praised God, but now there is a Man-God who fulfils that ministry. There is a God who adores and is adored, and you only praise God by virtue of the Man-God, by the communication of His spirit, by the grace and power conferred on you by Jesus Christ. It is in Him and by Him that you perform this office, in concert with Him; for His attitude is one of unceasing love and praise toward God the Father, and He is present continually with you on the altar in the capacity of a sacrificial victim before God, a victim offered for your salvation. Inasmuch as He is the God made man, He is and ever will be the Holocaust, the sacrificial Lamb, the Victim offered to God.

"Wherefore in the strength of His Spirit, in the power of His grace in union with the tribute of praise He rendered to God the Father upon earth, and that which He ceases not to offer before the throne of God in heaven, celebrate the divine praises and deem yourselves happy to be in the presence of Jesus, to be dependent on and animated by His spirit, under the guidance of His grace, participators in His ministry and in the exercise of His function of Priest and Victim, which consists in praising God and consecrating your souls to His praise and glory."

Thus speaks the pious Cardinal. God grant that all Religious may familiarize their minds with the thoughts he suggests to them.

The Divine Office fills up a great part of the day, as its

different portions have to be recited separately; but there is another pious practice, one which is specially pleasing to the Heart of Our Lord, and a favorite one with Religious: the holy Rosary; this is recited in Community in most monasteries, and with some modern Congregations it replaces the Office.

The Blessed Virgin has her place in the canonical Office; at the commencement and the end of the Hours, the *Ave Maria* awakens fresh fervor, fresh joy in the hearts of her children. Three times a day the Angelus calls on them to venerate her. Everywhere in the cells, in the Community-rooms, in the corridors, and on the stairs, statues and pictures of our beloved Queen recall her to mind, or rather throw fresh fuel on a flame of love that never dies out. But the chaplet, or rather the Rosary, is preeminently the Psalter of Mary.

Let us offer her this sacrifice of praise with profound respect and filial affection. In order to say the Rosary with greater profit, we shall do well to meditate on the joyful, the sorrowful, the glorious mysteries. Here again we meet with the divine Victim, offered to God in the joyful mysteries, immolated in the sorrowful mysteries, and in those that recall His Resurrection and glorious Ascension, we behold Him transformed and glorified, yet still a Victim. Thus each day abounds in acts which serve to confirm the Religious in his character of a victim.

The weeks, months, and years have all their own special religious exercises. The Sacrament of Penance, approached every week, is of wonderful assistance, since in the sacred tribunal the blood of the divine Lamb is sprinkled afresh on the soul of the penitent. Each month, each year brings retreats and anniversaries, monthly or annual, and renewal of vows; all these are such powerful means of confirming the Religious who knows how to profit by them in his self-sacrifice, that one is tempted to

ask one's self how it is possible that these privileged souls can fail to attain to the most intimate, most perfect union with the adorable Victim. They will attain to that union before quitting this land of exile; there remains one more act of a decisive nature which will doubtless accomplish that desired end. We refer to the last sacrifice of the religious life.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE LAST SACRIFICE WHICH THE RELIGIOUS IS REQUIRED TO MAKE.

This last, this final sacrifice is that of our life in the hour of death. It is true that this sacrifice did, in a certain sense, begin with the first moment of our existence, as says St. Gregory the Great: "Our present life is but one long death;" and perhaps we may attach a similar meaning to St. Paul's words: "I die daily" (I. Cor. xv. 31); but this sacrificial process, this destruction of life by death becomes more apparent, more perceptible when the end is approaching and the sacrifice is finally consummated by the separation of soul and body when the last breath is drawn.

Death has several aspects; this one is perhaps the truest and most startling. In the death on the cross Our God offered the sacrifice of Himself; our death, accepted and undergone in the same dispositions as His, will also be the crowning act of our lifelong immolation.

St. Paul seems to have regarded the end, the destruction of this present life, from the same standpoint, when he wrote to Timothy: "I am now ready to be sacrificed;" *Ego enim jam delibor;* words to which this interpretation is given: "As for me, the time of my dissolution is at hand, and my blood shed in martyrdom will represent the libations poured over the sacrificial victims of the Old Testa-

ment." Mgr. Ginoulhiac, in his commentary on the Epistles to Timothy, has some excellent practical remarks on this passage.

"The Apostle," he says, "is so certain that he will suffer death, and that shortly, that he already looks upon himself as a victim consecrated by the libations which were preparatory to the sacrifice of old. Martyrdom is in fact to the eye of faith, a true sacrifice; it is a voluntary sacrifice, although he who offers it does not himself deal the fatal blow; it is a sacrifice of atonement, in which the victim, without being entirely innocent, is not put to death as the penalty of guilt, but is purified by the shedding of its blood."

The death of the true Christian is likewise, though less fully, a sacrifice. It is in evitable, yet we may make a virtue of necessity, and render it a voluntary sacrifice by our willing acceptance of it, and our union with the voluntary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Each one of us in undergoing death fills up in his person "those things that are wanting of the sacrifice," the ignominy and the suffering of Him who is our Head. And the one oblation of Calvary, "whereby He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. x. 14), was offered so entirely for us and in our name, that Jesus Christ continues to offer it and will offer it until the end of time in the person of each one of His members when their last hour arrives. Let each one of us therefore consider himself as branded for sacrifice, as a victim already dedicated by the preparatory libations, by "the sprinkling of blood which speaketh better than that of Abel" (Heb. xii. 24). And when the supreme moment comes, let us look to Jesus as the Sovereign Pontiff who is about to perpetuate and renew His sacrifice in us. By thus uniting ourselves to Him, by entering submissively, lovingly into His designs, by consenting to leave to Him the disposal of our life and death

at His good pleasure, we shall partake in His sacerdotal character, and thus consummate the sacrifice to accomplish which we were pledged in baptism.

How consolatory is this thought! By the secret and adorable designs of divine mercy, that which is the penalty our sins have justly deserved becomes a means of expiation, an opportunity of meriting! Thus the blow which we can not foresee or avert may become, by our union with Jesus Christ, in a certain sense a renewed oblation, an offering afresh of the sacrifice which "perfects forever them that are sanctified."

Such are the holy thoughts, the frame of mind inspired by faith wherewith the Religious sees death draw near. Infirmities, sicknesses are multiplied and aggravated; he looks upon them as stern but kind messengers who come to warn him that the final sacrifice is at hand. Nature may perhaps tremble at this announcement, but the soul, to whom self-surrender is no novelty, welcomes the celestial message. Unable wholly to resist the influence of frail and failing nature, she may exclaim with the prophet: "I have heard, and my bowels were troubled, my lips trembled at the voice; let rottenness enter into my bones, and swarm under me" (Hab. iii. 16). But sustained by the merciful succor of her divine Spouse, assisted by the charity of those around her, victims like herself, encouraged by the example of those whose fortitude at their hour of death she has witnessed, she will say with the great Apostle: "For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man is corrupted, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." And she delights in adding the words wherewith this same passage concludes: "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which

are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II. Cor. iv. 16–18).

How beautiful, if viewed in the light of faith, is the spectacle presented by the Religious who, after a life of self-surrender in the observance of the Rule and the holy vows, now offers his last and final sacrifice in the same spirit! If it is after long years spent in religion, years of faithful correspondence to the grace of his profession, years of unfailing acquiescence in the good pleasure of his divine Master, the omnipotent High-Priest, the spectacle of his agony and death is so sublime as to excite the rapturous admiration of angels. And if he ascends the altar of sacrifice while as yet a neophyte, after but a year or two of self-immolation in his character of victim, this is again a scene savoring more of heaven than of earth, awakening emotions of inexpressible sweetness.

Moriatur anima mea morte justorum! Let my soul die the death of the just, the death of those who are victims of Our Lord.

It must not, however, be supposed that the final sacrifice of the religious life is invariably attended by an increase of fervor, by sensible consolations. Disease and physical pain exercise through the medium of the senses so much influence upon the mind that they often reduce the soul herself to a state of languor and impotence. Even great saints are not exempt from this humiliating experience. But in that case the divine Spouse imparts strength to our weakness.

Let us listen to what Bossuet, that great genius who has spoken as few others have done of the final sacrifice, says touching this mystery of divine compassion:

"The Redeemer took upon Himself not the sins only but also the interests, the obligations, the duties of His children, and of those who are His true mystic members. Their last agony was distinctly present to His inward

vision whilst He hung on the cross; He foresaw by what death they should die; and as He knew full well how the suffering caused by an acute disease or sudden malady affects, together with the senses, the noblest faculties of the soul and renders them weak and helpless, who can comprehend the vast extent, the force of that charity which led Him to regard their agony as forming an inseparable part of His own? All that He then did was done in discharge of their debt, to supply what they were unable to do in their last moments. He consecrated in His own person the suffering that the soul naturally feels when the prospect of imminent and inevitable dissolution presents itself to her in gloomy, alarming colors; He sanctifies it by His own spirit of submission and penance, of sacrifice and homage to the supreme sovereignty of His Father. And if, on account of their reason being clouded, they are incapable of participating in His dispositions, He supplies their deficiencies, offering for them in the sight of His Father acts of charity and submission. Thus if they are incapable of having these sentiments themselves, they have them in Jesus Christ; and to have them in Him is equivalent to having them in their own person, in virtue of the association between Him and them which is effected by their union with Him."

Such are the grand, the encouraging utterances of this great orator. He continues:

"The devotion to the agony of the Son of God ought also to strongly incline the soul to study the last, most weighty words which fell from His lips: It is consummated (John xix. 30). This exclamation may be said to be the seal of the New Testament, of the New Covenant; but without entering upon all the meanings that may be attached to it, we will consider one of a practical nature, and most appropriate to our present subject.

"In the whole universe there is nothing greater than

Jesus Christ; and in Jesus Christ there is nothing greater than His sacrifice, and in His sacrifice there is nothing greater than His last breath, the moment which witnessed the separation of His sacred soul from His adorable Heart. It was at that memorable moment, fatal to hell but infinitely precious for the Church, that the Old Law being abolished and all the promises of the Old Testament fulfilled (as they only could be by the consummation of the sacrifice of the Mediator), the ancient sacrifices of irrational animals had no longer any efficacy; and all the children of the promises following in the Saviour's steps, and receiving the character of victims, it came to pass that their death, which until then was nothing but the just penalty of sin, was changed, by virtue of Christ's death, and acquired the nature of a sacrifice.

"All is consummated, we hear Him cry, and the barriers that impeded the exercise of My charity being broken through, the ocean of My love will bear on its tide to the remotest parts of the universe the virtue of My sacrifice. All is consummated; the death of My mystic members, being united to Mine, will henceforth only be the accomplishment of My promises to them, My designs for them. All is consummated; the consummation of their life, in their last moments, ought, in virtue of My death, to be qualified to become a perfect sacrifice, an act of homage to the perfections of the Most High. In this sense the Apostle understood those words, when he told the Hebrews that by one oblation once offered, Christ had perfected forever them that are sanctified; that is to say, that the death of all true Christians, who received the dedication of a victim at baptism, has now become a perfect sacrifice through the death of Christ, and that His oblation and theirs now form but one.

"This is the goal to which the grace of the sacraments, to which all religion tends. Here the agony of the Chris-

tian finds its ultimate end; the sacrifice of Christ is the preparation for it; He is the Sovereign Pontiff; all the natural element is eliminated from it, we only see in it what is supernatural. And one of the chief uses He will make of His sacerdotal functions will be to renew and perpetuate His sacrifice unto the end of time, not only in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, but in the death of all His faithful followers.

"It is in this spirit that the Viaticum ought to be received. The great High-Priest of the New Law enters into His temple, that is to say, He comes into the body and soul of the Christian, and there He offers anew the sacrifice of Himself, being in the Sacrament in the condition of a victim, and mystically reenacting the destruction of His natural life which took place on Calvary. He then exercised His office of Mediator with His Father, pleading with Him on behalf of the eternal interests of His elect, and this He does again in the soul of the Christian, who, being the altar whereon Our Lord exercises His sacerdotal functions, becomes like Him a priest and a victim. Thus at the last moment the Sovereign Pontiff takes possession of the victim by means of the sacrament which consecrates the death of that victim; He Himself becomes the seal which stamps him as a victim, and in the exercise of His right over a life that belongs to Him, He makes use of disease as the sacrificial knife wherewith to slay, to immolate the victim. Thus the Christian, uniting himself not only to the adorable body of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament, but also to His intentions, His spirit; entering into His designs by submission and resignation; desiring to dispose of his being and his life as the great High-Priest may choose, becomes at his death a priest in union with Him, and in his last hours completes the sacrifice to which he was pledged in baptism, and which it was his bounden duty to continue every moment of his life.

"Thus it is that the truth of the words: *Consummatum est*, is exemplified in the members, as it is in Christ their Head.

"Extreme Unction also adds to the perfection of this sacrifice. The ancient usage of the Church was to administer it previous to the Holy Viaticum to those who had lost their baptismal innocence, and for their misdeeds had been sentenced to perform canonical penance. For although they were supposed to be restored to a state of grace through the sacrament of reconciliation, yet it was known that heinous sins generally leave their traces on the soul, stains and impurities not easily effaced. Now God, who is a God of infinite purity, requires victims in which there is no spot or defect. This sacrament and the grace it imparts was intended partly to cleanse the victim; for this reason it was administered before the Holy Viaticum, in order that the High-Priest, finding the victim in a fit condition for sacrifice, might present it to His Father as a pure oblation before its final immolation by death.

"Ought not the faithful (and preeminently a Congregation of Religious) who are present at the administration of these sacraments, who witness the agony of the departing soul, ought not they, as well as the priest who is the minister and representative of Jesus Christ, to turn their thoughts completely from all that strikes the senses, so that the idea of a sacrifice in which that of the Saviour is about to be renewed, a sacrifice wherein they ought, each one in his measure, to share, may alone occupy their minds?

"May God grant us grace to enter into these truths and remember them when our last hour comes! Amen."

Thus our death will be the holy sacrifice, the holocaust of a sweet savor which imparts to the soul the purity and sanctity necessary for taking part in the eternal holocaust;

for this present life is only a preparation for that same participation in the eternal holocaust, the holocaust that is infinite in its perfection, to quote the language of the Fathers, which consists of the entire company of the angels and the elect; a holocaust whereof Jesus Christ is Himself the altar and at one and the same time both the officiating Priest and the first and greatest Victim; a holocaust consumed by the sacred fire of the Holy Spirit, presented to the eternal Father, and accepted by Him with infinite satisfaction throughout all eternity.

EPILOGUE.

This work was almost entirely composed at La Salette. It has been, as the reader will readily imagine, commended frequently, very frequently, to Our Lady of La Salette, the Mother of mercy and of fair love; and since it is in the immediate vicinity of the spot where she appeared, and in a house dedicated to her, that the writings of the Fathers of the Church, of ascetic authors, and the lives of the saints, which have aided in the compilation of this book, have been consulted and studied, it may be said that to a certain extent the work has been done in her gracious presence and beneath her favoring eye.

We say this in no boasting spirit (what indeed is there to boast of in it?), but because many Religious who have a special devotion to the Apparition of our merciful Mother at this place may be glad to know the fact. There are indeed thousands and thousands, of this we are well aware, whose heart turns with filial affection to this mystery of love, and who are interested in everything connected with it.

We think it will gratify the piety and filial devotion of such persons if, at the close of this volume, we make it apparent to them that Mary, in her Apparition, showed herself, in an admirable and touching manner, to be the pattern of all Religious.

The announcement of this intention is no doubt unexpected, and will serve to excite their lawful curiosity. We will satisfy it, both for their edification and for the glory of our kind and loving Mother. As the circumstances of

the Apparition are well known, we shall not relate them here.

The contents of this work may be summarized as follows:

1. The Religious is, in very truth, a victim offered to God in union with Jesus Christ in His divine sacrifice.

2. In this character he ought to be devoted entirely to God, to His interests, to His glory, and completely sacrificed to His good pleasure.

3. In order to accomplish this end, his life is a life of humility, poverty, chastity, mortification, modesty, obedience.

4. He takes delight in entire seclusion from the world and finds rest and peace in solitude and silence.

5. Finally, charity, tender, strong, constant, supernatural charity pervades and vivifies all that is in him and about him; his mind, his heart, his words, his actions; and thus he attains to the perfection of his state of self-surrender.

Such, in a few words, is the faithful portraiture of the Religious.

Now in her Apparition, Mary, in a wondrous manner that appeals to the heart, shows herself as commending for our imitation, by her supernatural state, her words, her acts, the virtues that constitute the perfection of the religious state.

We will repeat what we said just now concerning those virtues, and see how they are rendered desirable in our sight by the example of our compassionate Mother at La Salette.

1. The Religious is, in very truth, a victim offered to God in union with Jesus Christ in His divine sacrifice.

Now Our Lady of La Salette shows herself most strikingly to be a victim offered to God in union with her divine Son in His sacrifice of Himself. This point ought to be explained at length, for it is of paramount importance.

Since space forbids us to do this, we must refer the reader to our treatise entitled: On Union with Our Lord Jesus Christ in His Life as a Victim. The 23d chapter is entirely devoted to demonstrating that Mary appeared in the character of a victim at La Salette, and especially as a victim of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Thus devout souls, versed in the things of God, have at all times seen in the Blessed Virgin's attitude of humility, of self-annihilation, in her tears, the prayers she unceasingly offers to God on our behalf; the words whereby she urges us to be converted and expiate our sins by penance; in the pains she has taken (to quote her own expression) to hold back the avenging arm of her Son; in all this they see, in a manner that appears to them most evident, that she is a victim before God, united to Jesus, the Fount of all atonement, weighed down beneath the burden of divine justice, constituting herself, out of love for souls, a suppliant, a mediatrix, whose one desire is to appease an angry God, in order to save the souls who have offended against Him. There is no room for doubt on this point; in her Apparition Mary displays herself undeniably in the character of a victim, and consequently as the true model of every good Religious.

2. In his character of a victim, the Religious is entirely devoted to God, to His interests, to His glory, and completely sacrificed to His good pleasure.

Is it not for this, and this alone, that our merciful Mother came down to earth? What else engrosses her mind, absorbs her thoughts? What is it incites her to rouse tepid souls from their indifference, to warn unhappy sinners of the chastisements awaiting them? It is zeal for God's glory that inspires her, an ardent desire to promote His interests, His glory. Devoted as she herself is to His good will and pleasure, she would fain see the souls of all mankind equally devoted to that same good pleasure, that adorable will.

3. The life of the Religious is a life of humility.

Who can speak aright of the sublime, the touching humility Our Lady exhibited at La Salette? It is one of the most notable characteristics of the Apparition. In the first place, Mary displays humility in the language she adopts. Nothing is more simple than the way in which she speaks to the little shepherds, the questions she puts to them, the instructions she gives them. She even condescends to employ the patois of that locality. Who can fail to be touched by such kind condescension, such wondrous humility?

Mary's dress was also of the humblest description. Doubtless the Queen of heaven is arrayed in glorious apparel radiant in the light of the glorified body, but what could be more lowly, more ordinary than the form in which her celestial splendor was veiled? She wore, the children asserted, the garb of the humblest peasant women, "with an apron in front," after the manner of servants.

Again, Mary displays her humility in her choice of those who were to be the privileged witnesses of her Apparition. They were young children, poor, ignorant peasants, almost entirely destitute of the natural qualities which render children interesting and attractive at their age. In the eyes of the world they were utterly despicable; "the base things of the world and the things that are contemptible hath God chosen," as St. Paul says (I Cor. i. 28).

Mary displays humility also in the selection of the spot where she appeared; for although La Salette has become a place of renown since the apparition, it was previously unknown. What was said formerly of Nazareth was true of it in the strictest sense of the words: "Can any good thing come from Narazeth?" The commentator, expounding this passage, adds: Nazareth was an obscure, insignificant village, which the Jews spoke of with contempt. It

was just the same with La Salette. But Jesus chose to be called a Nazarite, and Mary is not ashamed to be known as Our Lady of La Salette.

The life of the Religious is a life of poverty. Our Lady of La Salette shows that she loves poverty dearly. The two chosen witnesses of her Apparition are poor children. Melanie, who was fourteen years old at the time, had been in service since she was six years of age, to earn her daily bread. Maximin was the child of needy parents. The spot where the heavenly Visitant manifested herself was inhabited by the poorest class of peasants. She speaks to them of the crops, on which the poor depend for their sustenance; she talks to them in the patois of the mountaineers, the language of the laborers.

The life of the Religious is a life of chastity, of modesty, of mortification.

In her Apparition at La Salette, our blessed Lady shows herself preeminently as the Virgin of virgins. Maximin never was able even to see her countenance; Melanie only saw it through her tears. Her hair was entirely hidden, and her hands also while she was speaking. Some devout persons allege that her feet did not touch the ground, because it was not fitting that the feet of the purest of Virgins should rest upon this miserable earth, defiled as it is by so many sins.

The life of the Religious is a life of obedience. It is in this virtue more than in any other that the perfection of his state of self-sacrifice consists.

Is not this the virtue which the Mother of mercy principally enjoined on us? Listen to the first words she utters, which embody the substance of all she said subsequently: "If my people will not submit, I shall be compelled to relax my grasp on the arm of my Son." If my people will not submit! Here then is the source of all the evils that afflict society, the family, and also—it

can not be denied—religious Communities; just as obedience, the perfect submission of mind, of heart, of will, is, in religious Houses, the source of all that is good.

4. The Religious lives in complete seclusion from the world, and takes delight in silence and solitude.

The heights of La Salette are in themselves a profound solitude, far removed from the world and the noise and turmoil of the world. The tranquillity, the silence that prevail there are quite impressive; even on days when there is a large concourse of people, the same peace, the same calm seems to rest on the soul. And what is this silence but that of the Queen of our affections, as she sits weeping, covering her countenance with her hands.

5. Finally, charity, tender, strong, unwavering, supernatural charity pervades and vivifies his whole being; his mind, his heart, his words, his actions.

Mary, in her Apparition, is a model of charity. What a great and glorious theme is this! We have considered it elsewhere; we can not speak of it here as befits such a subject. The appearance of our beloved Mother is a miracle of charity; who can estimate aright the tender love of this maternal heart! She weeps over us because of the temporal calamities which threaten us, and because of the eternal chastisements, infinitely more to be dreaded, which will surely overtake us, unless we do penance.

What words can describe her maternal devotedness? She prays for us unceasingly; she holds back the arm of her Son, uplifted to strike; she prostrates herself before Him, to obtain mercy for us. She complains of our ingratitude, she threatens us with chastisement, she promises pardon to the penitent.

How truly maternal is the solicitude of her loving heart! How earnestly she desires to avert the judgments of heaven hanging over our heads, to draw down on us celestial benedictions.

Observe also that her charity is all-embracing. The poor, the young, the ignorant, the afflicted, all who need counsel and consolation find in her a mother's love.

She is concerned on account of the failure of the crops, the loss of which falls most heavily on the poor.

Appearing to two young children, she constitutes herself to a certain extent their teacher; she speaks to them of the necessity of prayer, a matter whereof they are ignorant, and instructs them in the other duties of the Christian in regard to the commandments of God and of the Church.

She bids the afflicted look upon the crucifix that she wears and the celestial aureola that envelops her, in order that the sight of Our Lord's example, and the thought of the glory awaiting us when this exile is ended, may encourage them to suffer with greater resignation and hope.

Finally, by showing herself to be filled with solicitude and zeal for unhappy sinners, who are unfortunately her enemies and those of her Son, Mary teaches us to love our adversaries, to pray for them and do good to them.

Here we must end. We have only sketched in rough outline this beautiful and affecting subject. But is not every shade of doubt dispelled from the mind of the pious reader? It is undeniable that Mary really and truly showed herself, at La Salette, to be the pattern and example of the Religious.

The Apparition of the Mother of mercy took place in a little valley at the summit of the Alps. On the declivity on the eastern side is a narrow path, but little trod, leading to the adjacent height. Mary took that path, though her feet never touched the ground, still weeping, and accompanied by the halo of glory that shone around her. On reaching the eminence she remained for a few moments raised above the earth and then ascended to heaven.

Thus the Religious considers himself to be an exile upon earth and, whilst awaiting the hour of his release, does the

work God has given him to do in humility, charity, and the spirit of penance; meanwhile he will ascend constantly in spirit to heaven, not allowing himself to rest here below, finding in God his sole support, and surrounding himself with the light of faith, with purity of intention, to be his unfailing guide amid the dark shadows of time. In this manner he will reach the end of life, and will mount up to heaven, where the God who is his first beginning and final end reigns supreme for evermore.

O Mary, Our Lady of La Salette, our loving Queen, our life, our sweetness, our hope in this land of exile! I now lay down the pen which I took up, as I humbly trust, under the auspices of thy approval, in honor of thy divine Son, and for the good of the souls whose happy privilege it is to be consecrated to Him. In conclusion, I venture to present this humble and fervent petition: Grant, O compassionate Queen, that all who read this book and he who wrote it, together with the souls who are ransomed by the precious blood of thy divine Son, our adorable Victim, may one day meet in thy presence before thy throne in their true and eternal country. Amen.

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